BOOK II

DESTINY AND THE MARIONETTES

CHAPTER I

THE FASTIDIOUS MARQUIS

Through the land of the strapping, thick-ribbed pioneers of Kentucky the strollers bent their course--a country where towns and hamlets were rapidly springing up in the smiling valleys or on the fertile hillsides; where new families dropping in, and old ones obeying the injunction to be "fruitful and multiply" had so swelled the population that the region, but a short time before sparsely settled, now teemed with a sturdy people. To Barnes' satisfaction, many of the roads were all that could have been wished for, the turnpike system of the center of the state reflecting unbounded credit upon its builders.

If a people may be judged by its highways, Kentucky, thus early, with its macadamized roads deserved a prominent place in the sisterhood of states. Moreover, while mindful always of her own internal advancement, she persistently maintained an ever-watchful eye and

closest scrutiny on the parental government and the acts of congress. "Give a Kentuckian a plug of tobacco and a political antagonist and he will spend a comfortable day where'er he may be," has been happily said. It was this hardy, horse-raising, tobacco-growing community which had given the peerless Clay to the administrative councils of the country; it was this rugged cattle-breeding, whisky-distilling people which had offered the fearless Zach Taylor to spread the country's renown on the martial field.

What sunny memories were woven in that pilgrimage for the strollers! Remembrance of the corn-husking festivities, and the lads who, having found the red ears, kissed the lasses of their choice; of the dancing that followed--double-shuffle, Kentucky heel-tap, pigeon wing or Arkansas hoe-down! And mingling with the remembrance of such pleasing diversions were the yet more satisfying recollections of large audiences, generous-minded people and substantial rewards, well-won; rewards which enabled them shortly afterward to pay by post the landlord from whom they had fled.

Down the Father of Waters a month or so after their flight into the blue grass country steamed the packet bearing the company of players, leaving behind them the Chariot of the Muses.

At the time of their voyage down the Mississippi "the science of piloting was not a thing of the dead and pathetic past," and wonderful accounts were written of the autocrats of the wheel and the

characteristics of the ever-changing, ever-capricious river.
"Accidents!" says an early steamboat captain. "Oh, sometimes we run foul of a snag or sawyer, occasionally collapse a boiler and blow up sky-high. We get used to these little matters and don't mind them."

None of these trifling incidents was experienced by the players, however, who thereby lost, according to the Munchausens of the period, half of the pleasure and excitement of the trip. In fact, nothing more stirring than taking on wood from a flatboat alongside, or throwing a plank ashore for a passenger, varied the monotony of the hour, and, approaching their destination, the last day on the "floating palace" dawned serenely, uneventfully.

The gray of early morn became suffused with red, like the flush of life on a pallid cheek. Arrows of light shot out above the trees; an expectant hush pervaded the forest. Inside the cabin a sleepy negro began the formidable task of sweeping. This duty completed, he shook a bell, which feature of his daily occupation the darky entered into with diabolical energy, and soon the ear-rending discord brought the passengers on deck. But hot cornbread, steaks and steaming coffee speedily restored that equanimity of temper disturbed by the morning's clangorous summons.

Breakfast over, some of the gentlemen repaired to the boiler deck for the enjoyment of cigars, the ladies surrounded the piano in the cabin, while a gambler busied himself in getting into the good graces of a

young fellow who was seeing the world. Less lonely became the shores, as the boat, panting as if from long exertion, steamed on. Carrolton and Lafayette were left behind. Now along the banks stretched the showy houses and slave plantations of the sugar planters; and soon, from the deck of the boat, the dome of the St. Charles and the cathedral towers loomed against the sky.

Beyond a mile or so of muddy water and a formidable fleet of old hulks, disreputable barges and "small fry broad-horns," lay Algiers, graceless itself as the uninviting foreground; looking out contemplatively from its squalor at the inspiring view of Nouvelle Orleans, with the freighters, granaries and steamboats, three stories high, floating past; comparing its own inertia--if a city can be presumed capable of such edifying consciousness!--with the aspect of the busy levee, where cotton bales, sugar hogsheads, molasses casks, tobacco, hemp and other staple articles of the South, formed, as it were, a bulwark, or fortification of peace, for the habitations behind it. Such was the external appearance--suggestive of commerce--of that little center whose social and bohemian life was yet more interesting than its mercantile features.

At that period the city boasted of its Addison of letters--since forgotten; its Feu-de-joie, the peerless dancer, whose beauty had fired the Duke Gambade to that extravagant conduct which made the recipient of those marked attentions the talk of the town; its Roscius of the drama; its irresistible ingenue, the lovely, little

Fantoccini; and its theatrical carpet-knight, M. Grimacier, whose intrigue with the stately and, heretofore, saintly Madame Etalage had, it was said later, much to do with the unhappy taking-off of that ostentatious and haughty lady. It had Mlle. Affettuoso, songstress, with, it is true, an occasional break in her trill; and, last, but not least, that general friend of mankind, more puissant, powerful and necessary than all the nightingales, butterflies, or men of letters--who, nevertheless, are well enough in their places!--Tortier, the only Tortier, who carried the art de cuisine to ravishing perfection, whose ragouts were sonnets in sauce and whose fricassees nothing less than idyls!

Following the strollers' experiences with short engagements and improvised theaters, there was solace in the appearance of the city of cream and honey, and the players, assembled on the boiler deck, regarded the thriving port with mingled feelings as they drew nearer. Susan began forthwith to dream of conquests--a swarthy Mexican, the owner of an opal mine; a prince from Brazil; a hidalgo, exile, or any other notable among the cosmopolitan people. Adonis bethought himself of dusky beauties, waiting in their carriages at the stage entrance; sighing for him, languishing for him; whirling him away to a supper room--and Paradise! Regretfully the wiry old lady reverted to the time when she and her first husband had visited this Paris of the South, and, with a deep sigh, paid brief tribute to the memory of conjugal felicity.

Constance's eyes were grave as they rested upon the city where she would either triumph or fail, and the seriousness of her task came over her, leaning with clasped hands against the railing of the boat. Among that busy host what place would be made for her? How easy it seemed to be lost in the legion of workers; to be crushed in the swaying crowd! It was as though she were entering a room filled with strangers, and stood hesitating on the threshold. But youth's assurance soon set aside this gloomy picture; the shadow of a smile lighted her face and her glance grew bright. At twenty the world is rosy and in the perspective are many castles.

Near by the soldier also leaned against the rail, looking not, however, at New Orleans but at her, while all unconscious of his regard she continued to gaze cityward. His face, too, was thoughtful. The haphazard journey was approaching its end, and with it, in all likelihood, the bond of union, the alliance of close comradeship associated with the wilderness. She was keenly alive to honor, fame, renown. What meaning had those words to him--save for her? He smiled bitterly, as a sudden revulsion of dark thoughts crowded upon him. He had had his bout; the sands of the arena that once had shone golden now were dust.

Drawing up to the levee, they became a part of the general bustle and confusion; hurriedly disembarked, rushed about for their luggage, because every one else was rushing; hastily entered carriages of which there was a limited supply, and were whisked off over the rough

cobblestones which constituted the principal pavements of the city; catching momentary glimpses, between oscillations, of oyster saloons, fruit and old clothes' shops, and coffee stands, where the people ate in the open air. In every block were cafés or restaurants, and the sign "Furnished Rooms" appearing at frequent intervals along the thoroughfare through which they drove at headlong pace, bore evidence to the fact that the city harbored many strangers.

The hotel was finally reached--and what a unique hostelry it was! "Set the St. Charles down in St. Petersburg," commented a chronicler in 1846, "and you would think it a palace; in Boston, and ten to one, you would christen it a college; in London, and it would remind you of an exchange." It represented at that day the evolution of the American tavern, the primitive inn, instituted for passengers and wayfaring men; the development of the pot-house to the metropolitan hotel, of the rural ale-room to the palatial saloon.

"What a change from country hostelries!" soliloquized the manager, after the company were installed in commodious rooms. "No more inns where soap and towels are common property, and a comb, without its full complement of teeth, does service for all comers!" he continued, gazing around the apartment in which he found himself. "Think of real gas in your room, Barnes, and great chairs, easy as the arms of Morpheus! Are you comfortable, my dear?" he called out.

Constance's voice in an adjoining room replied affirmatively, and he

added: "I'm going down stairs to look around a bit."

Beneath the porch and reception hall extended the large bar-room, where several score of men were enjoying their liquors and lunches, and the hum of conversation, the clinking of glasses and the noise made by the skilful mixer of drinks were as sweet music to the manager, when shortly after he strode to the bar. Wearing neither coat nor vest, the bartender's ruffled shirt displayed a glistening stone; the sleeves were ornamented with gold buttons and the lace collar had a Byronic roll.

"What will you have, sir?" he said in a well-modulated voice to a big Virginian, who had preceded Barnes into the room.

"A julep," was the reply, "and, while you are making it, a little whisky straight."

A bottle of bourbon was set before him, and he wasted no valuable time while the bartender manipulated the more complicated drink. Experiencing the felicity of a man who has entered a higher civilization, the manager ordered a bottle of iced ale, drank it with gusto, and, seating himself, was soon partaking of a palatable dish. By this time the Virginian, joined by a friend, had ordered another julep for the near future and a little "straight" for the immediate present.

"Happy days!" said the former.

"And yours happier!" replied the newcomer.

"Why, it's Utopia," thought Barnes. "Every one is happy!"

But even as he thus ruminated, his glance fell upon an old man at the next table whom the waiters treated with such deference the manager concluded he must be some one of no slight importance. This gentleman was thin, wrinkled and worn, with a face Voltairian in type, his hair scanty, his dress elegant, and his satirical smile like the "flash of a dagger in the sunlight." He was inspecting his bouillon with manifest distrust, adjusting his eye-glass and thrusting his head close to the plate. The look of suspicion deepened and finally a grimace of triumph illumined his countenance, as he rapped excitedly on the table.

"Waiter, waiter, do you see that soup?" he almost shouted.

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis," was the humble response.

"Look at it well!" thundered the old gentleman. "Do you find nothing extraordinary about it?"

Again the bouillon was examined, to the amusement of the manager.

"I am sorry, Monsieur le Marquis; I can detect nothing unusual," politely responded the waiter, when he had concluded a pains-taking scrutiny with all the gravity and seriousness attending so momentous an investigation.

"You are blind!" exclaimed the old man. "See there; a spot of grease floating in the bouillon, and there, another and another! In fact, here is an 'Archipelago of Greece!'" This witticism was relieved by an ironical smile. "Take it away!"

The waiter hurried off with the offending dish and the old man looked immensely satisfied over the disturbance he had created.

"Well has it been said," thought the manager, "that the destiny of a nation depends upon the digestion of its first minister! I wonder what he'll do next?"

Course after course that followed was rejected, the guest keeping up a running comment:

"This sauce is not properly prepared. This salad is not well mixed. I shall starve in this place. These truffles; spoiled in the importation!"

"Oh, Monsieur le Marquis,"--clasping his hands in despair--"they were preserved in melted paraffin."

"What do I care about your paraffin? Never mind anything more, waiter. I could not eat a mouthful. What is the bill? Very well; and there is something for yourself, blockhead."

"Thank you, Monsieur le Marquis." Deferentially.

"The worst meal I've ever had! And I've been in Europe, Asia and Africa. Abominable--abominable--idiot of a waiter--miserable place, miserable--and this dyspepsia--"

Thus running on, with snatches of caustic criticism, the old gentleman shambled out, the waiter holding the door open for him and bowing obsequiously.

"An amiable individual!" observed Barnes to the waiter. "Is he stopping at the hotel?"

"No, Monsieur. He has an elegant house near by. The last time he was here he complimented the cook and praised the sauces. He is a little--what you call it?--whimsical!"

"Yes; slightly inclined that way. But is he here alone?"

"He is, Monsieur. He loses great sums in the gambling rooms. He keeps a box at the theater for the season. He is a prince--a great lord--?"

"Even if he calls you 'liar' and 'blockhead'?"

"Oh, Monsieur,"--displaying a silver dollar with an expressive shrug of the shoulders--"this is the--what you call it?--balm."

"And very good balm, too," said Barnes, heartily.

Still grumbling to himself, the marquis reached the main corridor, where the scene was almost as animated as in the bar and where the principal topic of conversation seemed to be horses and races that had been or were about to be run. "I'd put Uncle Rastus' mule against that hoss!" "That four-year-old's quick as a runaway nigger!" "Five hundred, the gelding beats the runaway nigger!" "Any takers on Jolly Rogers?" were among the snatches of talk which lent life and zest to the various groups.

Sitting moodily in a corner, with legs crossed and hat upon his knee, was a young man whose careless glance wandered from time to time from his cigar to the passing figures. As the marquis slowly hobbled along, with an effort to appear alert, the young man arose quickly and came forward with a conventional smile, intercepting the old nobleman near the door.

"My dear Monsieur le Marquis," he exclaimed, effusively, "it is with pleasure I see you recovered from your recent indisposition."

"Recovered!" almost shrieked the marquis. "I'm far from recovered; I'm worse than ever. I detest congratulations, Monsieur! It's what a lying world always does when you are on the verge of dissolution."

"You are as discerning as ever," murmured the land baron--for it was Edward Mauville.

"I'm not fit to be around; I only came out"--with a sardonic chuckle--"because the doctors said it would be fatal."

"Surely you do not desire--"

"To show them they are impostors? Yes."

"And does New Orleans continue to please you?" asked the other, with some of that pride Southerners entertained in those days for their queen city.

"How does the exile like the forced land of his adoption?" returned the nobleman, irritably. "My king is in exile. Why should I not be also? Should I stay there, herd with the cattle, call every shipjack 'Citizen' and every clod 'Brother'; treat every scrub as though she were a duchess?"

"There is, indeed, a regrettable tendency to deify common clay

nowadays," assented the patroon, soothingly.

"Why, your 'Citizen' regards it as condescension to notice a man of condition!" said the marquis, violently. "When my king was driven away by the rabble the ocean was not too broad to separate me from a swinish civilization. I will never go back; I will live there no more!"

"That is good news for us," returned the land baron.

"Your politeness almost reconciles me to staying," said the old man, more affably. "But I am on my way to the club. What do you say to a rubber?"

The patroon readily assented. In front of the hotel waited the marquis' carriage, on the door of which was his coat-of-arms--argent, three mounts vert, on each a sable bird. Entering this conveyance, they were soon being driven over the stones at a pace which jarred every bone in the marquis' body and threatened to shake the breath of life from his trembling and attenuated figure. He jumped about like a parched pea, and when finally they drew up with a jerk and a jolt, the marquis was fairly gasping. After an interval to recover himself, he took his companion's arm, and, with his assistance, mounted the broad steps leading to the handsome and commodious club house.

"At least," said the nobleman, dryly, as he paused on the stairs, "our

pavements are so well-kept in Paris that a drive there in a tumbril to the scaffold is preferable to a coach in New Orleans!"

CHAPTER II

"ONLY AN INCIDENT"

To the scattering of the anti-renters by the rescue party that memorable night at the manor the land baron undoubtedly owed his safety. Beyond reach of personal violence in a neighboring town, without his own domains, from which he was practically exiled, he had sought redress in the courts, only to find his hands tied, with no convincing clue to the perpetrators of these outrages. On the patroon lay the burden of proof, and he found it more difficult than he had anticipated to establish satisfactorily any kind of a case, for alibis blocked his progress at every turn.

At war with his neighbors, and with little taste for the monotony of a northern winter, he bethought him of his native city, determined to leave the locality and at a distance wait for the turmoil to subside. His brief dream of the rehabilitation of the commonwealth brought only memories stirring him to restlessness. He made inquiries about the strollers, but to no purpose. The theatrical band had come and gone like gipsies.

Saying nothing to any one, except Scroggs, to whom he entrusted a load of litigation, he at length quietly departed in the regular stage, until he reached a point where two strap rails proclaimed the new

method of conveyance. Wedged in the small compartment of a little car directly behind a smoking monster, with an enormous chimney, fed with cord-wood, he was borne over the land, and another puffing marvel of different construction carried him over the water. Reaching the Crescent City some time before the strollers--his progress expedited by a locomotive that ran full twenty miles an hour!--the land baron found among the latest floating population, comprised of all sorts and conditions, the Marquis de Ligne. The blood of the patroons flowed sluggishly through the land baron's veins, but his French extraction danced in every fiber of his being. After learning the more important and not altogether discreditable circumstances about the land baron's ancestors--for if every gentleman were whipped for godlessness, how many striped backs would there be!--the marquis, who declined intimacy with Tom, Dick and Harry, and their honest butchers, bakers and candlestick-makers of forefathers, permitted an acquaintance that accorded with his views governing social intercourse.

"This is a genuine pleasure, Monsieur le Marquis," observed the land baron suavely, when the two found themselves seated in a card room with brandy and soda before them. "To meet a nobleman of the old school is indeed welcome in these days when New Orleans harbors the refugees of the world, for, strive as we will, outsiders are creeping in and corrupting our best circles."

"Soon we shall all be corrupt," croaked the old man. "France--but what can you expect of a nation that exiles kings!"

"Ah, Louis Philippe! My father once entertained him here in New Orleans," said Mauville.

"Indeed?" remarked the marquis with interest.

"It was when he visited the city in 1798 with his brothers, the Duke of Montpensier and the Count of Beaujolais. New Orleans then did not belong to America. France was not so eager to sell her fair possessions in those days. I remember my father often speaking of the royal visit. The king even borrowed money, which"--laughing--"he forgot to pay!"

The marquis' face was a study, as he returned stiffly: "Sir, it is a king's privilege to borrow."

"It is his immortal prerogative," answered Mauville easily. "I only mentioned it to show how highly he honored my father."

The nobleman lifted his eyebrows, steadily regarding his companion.

"It was a great honor," he said softly. "One does not lend to a king. When Louis Philippe borrowed from your father he lent luster to your ancestry."

"Yes; I doubt not my father regarded himself as the debtor. Again, we

had another distinguished compatriot of yours at our house--General Lafayette."

"Lafayette!" repeated the marquis. "Ah, that's another matter! A man, born to rank and condition, voluntarily sinking to the level of the commonalty! A person of breeding choosing the cause of the rout and rabble! How was he received?"

"Like a king!" laughed Mauville. "A vast concourse of people assembled before the river when he embarked on the 'Natchez' for St. Louis."

Muttering something about "bourgeoisie!--épicier!" the nobleman partook of the liquid consolation before him, which seemed to brighten his spirits.

"If my doctors could see me now! Dolts! Quacks!"

"It's a good joke on them," said Mauville, ironically.

"Isn't it? They forbid me touching stimulants. Said they would be fatal! Impostors! Frauds! They haven't killed me yet, have they?"

"If so, you are a most agreeable and amiable ghost," returned Mauville.

"An amiable ghost!" cackled the old man. "Ha! Ha! you must have your

joke! But don't let me have such a ghastly one again. I don't like"--in a lower tone--"jests about the spirits of the other world."

"What! A well-seasoned materialist like you!"

"An idle prejudice!" answered the marquis. "Only when you compared me to a ghost"--in a half whisper--"it seemed as though I were one, a ghost of myself looking back through years of pleasure--years of pleasure!"

"A pleasant perspective such memories make, I am sure," observed the land baron.

"Memories," repeated the marquis, wagging his head. "Existence is first a memory and then a blank. But you have been absent from New Orleans, Monsieur?"

"I have been north to look after certain properties left me by a distant relative--peace to his ashes!"

"Only on business?" leered the marquis. "No affair of the heart? You know the saying: 'Love makes time pass--'"

"'And time makes love pass,'" laughed Mauville, somewhat unnaturally, his cynicism fraught with a twinge. "Nothing of the kind, I assure you! But you, Marquis, are not the only exile."

The nobleman raised his brows interrogatively.

"You fled from France; I fled from the ancestral manor. The tenants claimed the farms were theirs. I attempted to turn them out and--they turned me out! I might as well have inherited a hornet's nest. It was a legacy-of hate! The old patroon must have chuckled in his grave! One night they called with the intention of hanging me."

"My dear sir, I congratulate you!" exclaimed the nobleman enthusiastically.

"Thanks!" Dryly.

"It is the test of gentility. They only hang or cut off the heads of people of distinction nowadays."

"Gad! then I came near joining the ranks of the well-born angels. But for an accident I should now be a cherub of quality."

"And how, Monsieur, did you escape such a felicitous fate?"

The land baron's face clouded. "Through a stranger--a Frenchman--a silent, taciturn fellow--more or less an adventurer, I take it. He called himself Saint-Prosper--"

"Saint-Prosper!"

The marquis gazed at Mauville with amazement and incredulity. He might even have flushed or turned pale, but such a possible exhibition of emotion was lost beneath an artificial bloom, painted by his valet. His eyes, however, gleamed like candles in a death's head.

"This Saint-Prosper you met was a soldier?" he asked, and his voice trembled. "Ernest Saint-Prosper?"

"Yes; he was a soldier; served in Africa, I believe. You knew him?" Turning to the marquis in surprise.

"Knew him! He was my ward, the rascal!" cried the other violently. "He was, but now--ingrate!--traitor!--better if he were dead!"

"You speak bitterly, Monsieur le Marquis?" said the patroon curiously.

"Bitterly!--after his conduct!--he is no longer anything to me! He is dead to me--dead!"

"How did he deviate from the line of duty?" asked Mauville, with increasing interest, and an eagerness his light manner did not disguise. "A sin of omission or commission?"

"Eh? What?" mumbled the old nobleman, staring at his questioner, and, on a sudden, becoming taciturn. "A family affair!" he added finally, with dignity. "Not worth repeating! But what was he doing there?"

"He had joined a strolling band of players," said the other, concealing his disappointment as best he might at his companion's evasive reply.

"A Saint-Prosper become an actor!" shouted the marquis, his anger again breaking forth. "Has he not already dragged an honored name in the dust? A stroller! A player!" The marquis fairly gasped at the enormity of the offense; for a moment he was speechless, and then asked feebly: "What caused him to take such a humiliating step?"

"He is playing the hero of a romance," said the land baron, moodily. "I confess he has excellent taste, though! The figure of a Juno--eyes like stars on an August night--features proud as Diana--the voice of a siren--in a word, picture to yourself your fairest conquest, Monsieur le Marquis, and you will have a worthy counterpart of this rose of the wilderness!"

"My fairest conquest!" piped the listener. With lack-luster eyes he remained motionless like a traveler in the desert who gazes upon a mirage. "You have described her well. The features of Diana! It was at a revival of Vanbrugh's 'Relapse' I first met her, dressed after the fashion of the Countess of Ossory. Who would not worship before

the figures of Lely?"

He half closed his eyes, as though gazing in fancy upon the glossy draperies and rosy flesh of those voluptuous court beauties.

"The wooing, begun in the wings, ended in an ivy-covered villa--a retired nook--solitary walks by day--nightingales and moonshine by night. It was a pleasing romance while it lasted, but joy palls on one. Nature abhors sameness. The heart is like Mother Earth--ever varying. I wearied of this surfeit of Paradise and--left her!"

"A mere incident in an eventful life," said his companion, thoughtfully.

"Yes; only an incident!" repeated the marquis. "Only an incident! I had almost forgotten it, but your conversation about players and your description of the actress brought it to mind. It had quite passed away; it had quite passed away! But the cards, Monsieur Mauville; the cards!"

CHAPTER III

AT THE RACES

For several days, after rehearsals were over, the strollers were free to amuse themselves as they pleased. Their engagement at the theater did not begin for about a week, and meanwhile they managed to combine recreation with labor in nearly equal proportions. Assiduously they devoted themselves to a round of drives and rambles: through pastures and wood-land to Carrolton; along the shell road to Lake Pontchartrain; to Biloxi, the first settlement of the French; and to the battle grounds, once known as the plains of Chalmette, where volunteer soldiers were now encamped, awaiting orders to go to the front in the Mexican campaign. For those who craved greater excitement, the three race-courses--the Louisiana, the Metairie and the Carrolton offered stimulating diversion.

Within sight of the Metairie were the old dueling grounds, under the oaks, where, it is related, on one Sunday in '39 ten duels occurred; where the contestants frequently fought on horseback with sabers; and, where the cowherds, says a chronicler, became so accustomed to seeing honor satisfied in this manner that they paid little attention to these meetings, pursuing their own humble duties, indifferent to the follies of fashionable society. The fencing schools flourished--what memories cluster around that odd,

strange master of the blade, Spedella, a melancholy enigma of a man, whose art embodied much of the finest shading and phrasing peculiar to himself; from whom even many of Bonaparte's discarded veterans were not above acquiring new technique and temperament! Men in those days were most punctilious about reputation, but permitted a sufficiently wide latitude in its interpretation not to hamper themselves or seriously interfere with their desires or pleasures. Thus, virtue did not become a burden, nor honor a millstone. Both, like epaulets or tassels, were worn lightly and befittingly.

Shortly after the players' arrival began the celebrated Leduc matches, attracting noted men and women from all over the South. The hotels were crowded, the lodging-houses filled, while many of the large homes hospitably opened their doors to visiting friends. The afternoons found the city almost deserted; the bartenders discontentedly smoked in solitude; the legion of waiters in the hotels and resorts became reduced to a thinly scattered array; while even the street venders had "folded their tents" and silently stolen to the races. On one such memorable occasion most of the members of Barnes' company repaired to the Metairie.

Below the grand stand, brilliant with color, strutted the dandies attending to their bets; above they played a winning or losing game with the fair sex. Intrigue and love-making were the order of the hour, and these daughters of the South beguiled time--and mortals!--in

a heyday of pleasure. In that mixed gathering burly cotton planters from the country rubbed elbows with aristocratic creoles, whose attire was distinguishable by enormous ruffles and light boots of cloth. The professional follower of these events, the importunate tout, also mingled with the crowd, plainly in evidence by the pronounced character of his dress, the size of his diamond studs or cravat pin, and the massive dimensions of his finger rings. No paltry, scrubby track cadger was this resplendent gentleman, but a picturesque rogue, with impudence as pronounced as his jewels!

Surrounded by a bevy of admirers, Susan, sprightly and sparkling, was an example of that "frippery one of her sex is made up with, a pasticcio of gauzes, pins and ribbons that go to compound that multifarious thing, a well-dressed woman." Ever ready with a quick retort, she bestowed her favors generously, to the evident discomfiture of a young officer in her retinue whom she had met several days before, and who, ever since, had coveted a full harvest of smiles, liking not a little the first sample he had gathered. However, it was not Susan's way to entrust herself fully to any one; it was all very interesting to play one against another; to intercept angry gleams; to hold in check clashing suitors--this was exciting and diverting--but she exercised care not to transgress those bounds where she ceased to be mistress of the situation. Perhaps her limits in coquetry were further set than most women would have ventured to place them, but without this temerity and daring, the pastime would have lost its charm for

her. She might play with edged tools, but she also knew how to use them.

Near her was seated Kate, indolent as of yore, now watching her sister with an indulgent, enigmatic expression, anon permitting a scornful glance to stray toward Adonis, who, for his part, had eyes only for his companion, a distinct change from country hoidens, tavern demoiselles and dainty wenches, with their rough hands and rosy cheeks. This lady's hands were like milk; her cheeks, ivory, and Adonis in bestowing his attentions upon her, had a two-fold purpose: to return tit for tat for Kate's flaunting ways, and to gratify his own ever-fleeting fancy.

In a box, half the length of the grand stand removed, some distance back and to the left of Susan's gay party, Constance, Mrs. Adams and the soldier were also observers of this scene of animation.

Since the manager's successful flight from the landlord and the constables, the relations of the young girl and Saint-Prosper had undergone little change. At first, it is true, with the memory of the wild ride to the river fresh in her mind, and the more or less disturbing recollections of that strange, dark night, a certain reticence had marked her manner toward the soldier; but, as time went by, this touch of reserve wore off, and was succeeded by her usual frankness or gaiety. In her eyes appeared, at times, a new thoughtfulness, but for no longer period than the quick passing of

a summer cloud over a sunny meadow. This half-light of brief conjecture or vague retrospection only mellowed the depths of her gaze, and Barnes alone noted and wondered.

But to-day no partial shadows lay under the black, shading lashes; the exhilarating scene, the rapidly succeeding events, the turbulence and flutter around her, were calculated to dispel the most pronounced abstraction. Beneath a protecting parasol--for the sunlight shot below the roof at the back and touched that part of the grand stand--a faint glow warmed her cheeks, while her eyes shone with the gladness of the moment. Many of the dandies, regarding her with marked persistency, asked who she was, and none knew, until finally Editor-Rhymster Straws was appealed to. Straws, informed on all matters, was able to satisfy his questioners.

"She is an actress," said Straws. "So we are told. We shall find out next week. She is a beauty. We can tell that now."

"You're right, Straws!" exclaimed a pitch-and-toss youngster. "If she shows as well at the wire--"

"You'd take a long chance on her winning?" laughed the philosopher.

"I'll play you odds on it!" cried the juvenile. "Four to one, damme! I'll risk that on her eyes."

"Four to one on a lady's eyes, child! Say forty to one, and take the hazard of the die."

Standing near the rhymster, story-writer and journalist, was a tall young man, dressed in creole fashion. He followed the glances of Straws' questioners and a pallor overspread his dark complexion as he looked at the object of their attention.

"The stroller!" he exclaimed half audibly. "Her counterpart doesn't exist."

He stepped back where he could see her more plainly. In that sea of faces, her features alone shone before him, clearly, insistently.

"Do you know her, Mr. Mauville?" asked the rhymster, observing that steadfast glance.

"Know her?" repeated the land baron, starting. "Oh, I've seen her act."

"Tip me off her points and I'll tip my readers."

"She is going to play here then?" said the patroon.

"Yes. What is she like? Does tragedy or comedy favor her most? You see," he added apologetically, "when people begin to talk

about anybody, we Grubstreet hacks thrive on the gossip. It is deplorable"--with regret--"but small talk and tattle bring more than a choice lyric or sonnet. And, heaven help us!"--shaking his head--"what a vendible article a fine scandal is! It sells fast, like goods at a Dutch auction. Penny a line? More nearly six pence! If I could only bring myself to deal in such merchandise! If I were only a good rag picker, instead of a bad poet!" And Straws walked away, forgetting the questions he had asked in his own more interesting cogitations.

Without definite purpose, the patroon, who had listened with scant attention to the poet, began to move slowly toward the actress, and at that moment, the eyes of the soldier, turning to the saddling paddock, where the horses were being led out, fell upon the figure drawing near, recognizing in him the heir to the manor, Edward Mauville. Construing in his approach a deliberate intention, a flush of quick anger overspread Saint-Prosper's face and he glanced at the girl by his side. But her manner assured him she had not observed the land baron, for at that moment she was looking in the opposite direction, endeavoring to discover Barnes or the others of the company in the immense throng.

Murmuring some excuse to his unconscious companion and cutting short the wiry old lady's reminiscences of the first public trotting race in 1818, the soldier left the box, and, moving with some difficulty through the crowd, met Mauville in the aisle near the stairway. The

latter's face expressed surprise, not altogether of an agreeable nature, at the encounter, but he immediately regained his composure.

"Ah, Monsieur Saint-Prosper," he observed easily, "I little thought to see you here."

"Nor I you!" said the other bluntly.

The patroon gazed in seeming carelessness from the soldier to the young girl. Saint-Prosper's presence in New Orleans could be accounted for; he had followed her from the Shadengo Valley across the continent; the drive begun at the country inn--he looking down from the dormer window to witness the start--had been a long one; very different from his own brief flight, with its wretched end. These thoughts coursed rapidly through the land baron's brain; her appearance rekindled the ashes of the past; the fire in his breast flamed from his eyes, but otherwise he made no display of feeling. He glanced out upon the many faces below them, bowing to one woman and smiling at another.

"Oh, I couldn't stand a winter in the North," resumed the patroon, turning once more to the soldier. "Although the barn-burners promised to make it warm for me!"

Offering no reply to this sally, Saint-Prosper's gaze continued to rest coldly and expectantly upon the other. Goaded by that arbitrary

regard, an implied barrier between him and the young girl, the land baron sought to press forward; his glittering eyes met the other's; the glances they exchanged were like the thrust and parry of swords. Without wishing to address the actress--and thereby risk a public rebuff--it was, nevertheless, impossible for the hot-blooded Southerner to submit to peremptory restraint. Who had made the soldier his taskmaster? He read Saint-Prosper's purpose and was not slow to retaliate.

"If I am not mistaken, yonder is our divinity of the lane," said the patroon softly. "Permit me." And he strove to pass.

The soldier did not move.

"You are blocking my way, Monsieur," continued the other, sharply.

"Not if it lies the other way."

"This way, or that way, how does it concern you?" retorted the land baron.

"If you seek further to annoy a lady whom you have already sufficiently wronged, it is any man's concern."

"Especially if he has followed her across the country," sneered Mauville. "Besides, since when have actresses become so chary of their

favors?" In his anger the land baron threw out intimations he would have challenged from other lips. "Has the stage then become a holy convent?"

"You stamped yourself a scoundrel some time ago," said the soldier slowly, as though weighing each word, "and now show yourself a coward when you malign a young girl, without father, brother--"

"Or lover!" interrupted the land baron. "Perhaps, however, you were only traveling to see the country! A grand tour, enlivened with studies of human nature, as well as glimpses of scenery!"

"Have you anything further with me?" interjected Saint-Prosper, curtly.

The patroon's blood coursed, burning, through his veins; the other's contemptuous manner stung him more fiercely than language.

"Yes," he said, meaningly, his eyes challenging Saint-Prosper's. "Have you been at Spedella's fencing rooms? Are you in practice?"

Saint-Prosper hesitated a moment and the land baron's face fell. Was it possible the other would refuse to meet him? But he would not let him off easily; there were ways to force--and suddenly the words of the marquis recurring to him, he surveyed the soldier, disdainfully.

"Gad! you must come of a family of cowards and traitors! But you shall fight or--the public becomes arbiter!" And he half raised his arm threateningly.

The soldier's tanned cheek was now as pale as a moment before it had been flushed; his mouth set resolutely, as though fighting back some weakness. With lowering brows and darkening glance he regarded the land baron.

"I was thinking," he said at length, with an effort, "that if I killed you, people would want to know the reason."

The patroon laughed. "How solicitous you are for her welfare--and mine! Do you then measure skill only by inches? If so, I confess you would stand a fair chance of despatching me. But your address? The St. Charles, I presume." The soldier nodded curtly, and, having accomplished his purpose, Mauville had turned to leave, when loud voices, in a front box near the right aisle, attracted general attention from those occupying that part of the grand stand. The young officer who had accompanied Susan to the races was angrily confronting a thick-set man, the latest recruit to her corps of willing captives. The lad had assumed the arduous task of guarding the object of his fancy from all comers, simply because she had been kind. And why should she not have been?--he was only a boy--she was old enough to be--well, an adviser! When, after a brief but pointed altercation, he flung himself away with a last reproachful look in the direction of

his enslaver, Susan looked hurt. That was her reward for being nice to a child!

"A fractious young cub!" said the thick-set man, complacently.

"Well, I like cubs better than bears!" retorted Susan, pointedly.

Not long, however, could the interest of the spectators be diverted from the amusement of the day and soon all eyes were drawn once more to the track where the horses' hoofs resounded with exciting patter, as they struggled toward the wire, urged by the stimulating voices of the jockeys.

But even when Leduc won the race, beating the best heat on record; when the ladies in the grand stand arose in a body, like a thousand butterflies, disturbed by a sudden footfall in a sunlit field; when the jockey became the hero of the hour; when the small boys outside nearly fell from the trees in their exuberance of ecstasy, and the men threw their hats in the air and shouted themselves hoarse--even these exhilarating circumstances failed to reawaken the land baron's concern in the scene around him. His efforts at indifference were chafing his inmost being; the cloak of insouciance was stifling him; the primeval man was struggling for expression, that brute-like rage whose only limits are its own fury and violence.

A quavering voice, near at hand, recalled him to himself, and turning,

he beheld the marquis approaching with mincing manner, the paint and pigments cracked by the artificial smiles wreathing his wrinkled face. In that vast assemblage, amid all the energy, youth and surfeit of vitality, he seemed like a dried and crackling leaf, tossed helplessly, which any foot might crush to dust. The roar of the multitude subsided, a storm dying in the distance; the ladies sank in their seats--butterflies settling once more in the fields--and Leduc, with drooping head, was led to the paddock, followed by a few fair adorers.

"I placed the winner, Monsieur Mauville," piped the marquis. "Though the doctors told me the excitement would kill me! What folly! Every new sensation adds a day to life."

"In your case, certainly, Marquis, for I never saw you looking younger," answered the land baron, with an effort.

"You are too amiable, my dear friend! The ladies would not think so," he added, mournfully wagging his head with anile melancholy.

"Nonsense!" protested the other. "With your spirit, animation--"

"If I thought you were right," interrupted the delighted marquis, taking his young friend's arm, "I would ask you to present me to the lady over there--the one you just bowed to."

"The deuce!" said Mauville to himself. "The marquis is becoming a bore."

"You rascal! I saw the smile she gave you," continued the other playfully. "And you ran away from her. What are the young men made of nowadays? In the old days they were tinder; women sparks. But who is she?"

"You mean Susan Duran, the actress?"

"An actress!" exclaimed the nobleman. "A charming creature at any rate!"

"All froth; a bubble!" added Mauville impatiently.

"How entertaining! Any lovers?" leered the nobleman.

"A dozen; a baker's dozen, for all I know!"

"What is her history?" said the marquis eagerly.

"I never inquired."

"Sometimes it's just as well," murmured the other vaguely. "How old is she?"

"How can you tell?" answered Mauville.

"In Paris I kept a little book wherein was entered the passe-parole of every pretty woman; age; lovers platonic! When a woman became a grandmother, I put a black mark against her name, for I have always held," continued the nobleman, wagging his head, "that a woman who is a grandmother has no business to deceive a younger generation of men. But present me to Miss Susan at once, my dear friend. I am all impatience to meet her."

His eagerness permitted no refusal; besides, Mauville was not in the mood to enjoy the nobleman's society, and was but too pleased to turn him over to the tender care of Susan.

"How do you do, Miss Duran," he said, having made his way to her box.

"Where did you drop from?" she asked, in surprise, giving him her hand.

"The skies," he returned, with forced lightness.

"A fallen angel!" commented Susan.

"Good! Charming!" cried the marquis, clapping his withered hands.

"Miss Duran, the Marquis de Ligne has requested the pleasure of

meeting you."

She flashed a smile at him. He bent over her hand; held it a moment in his icy grasp.

"The pleasure," said Susan, prettily, not shirking the ordeal, "is mine."

"In which case," added Mauville, half ironically, "I will leave you together to enjoy your happiness."

Eagerly availing himself of the place offered at her side, soon the marquis was cackling after the manner of a senile beau of the old school; relating spicy anecdotes of dames who had long departed this realm of scandal; and mingling witticism and wickedness in one continual flow, until like a panorama another age was revived in his words--an age when bedizened women wore patches and their perfumed gallants wrote verses on the demise of their lap-dogs; when "their virtue resembled a statesman's religion, the Quaker's word, the gamester's oath and the great man's honor--but to cheat those that trusted them!"

The day's events, however, were soon over; the city of pleasure finally capitulated; its people began rapidly to depart. That sudden movement resembled the migration of a swarm of bees to form a new colony, when, if the day be bright, the expedition issues forth with

wondrous rapidity. So this human hive commenced to empty itself of queens, drones and workers. It was an outgoing wave of such life and animation as is apparent in the flight of a swarm of cell-dwellers, giving out a loud and sharp-toned hum from the action of their wings as they soar over the blooming heather and the "bright consummate flowers." And these human bees had their passions, too! their massacres; their tragedies; their "Rival Queens"; their combats; their sentinels; their dreams of that Utopian form of government realized in the communistic society of insects.

"How did you enjoy it, my dear?" asked Barnes, suddenly reappearing at Constance's box. "A grand heat, that! Though I did bet on the wrong horse! But don't wait for us, Saint-Prosper. Mrs. Adams and I will take our time getting through the crowd. I will see you at the hotel, my dear!" he added, as the soldier and Constance moved away.

Only the merry home-going remained, and the culmination, a dinner at Moreau's, Victor's, or Miguel's, the natural epilogue to the day's pastime, the tag to the comedy! In the returning throng were creoles with sky-blue costumes and palmetto hats; the Lafourche or Attakapas planter; representatives of the older régime and the varied newer populace. Superb equipages mingled in democratic confusion with carts and wagons; the broken-winded nag and spavined crowbait--veterans at the bugle call!--pricked up their ears and kicked up their heels like colts in pasture, while the delighted darkies thumped their bony shanks to encourage this brief rejuvenescence.

Those who had lost felt the money well spent; those who had won would be the more lavish in the spending. They had simply won a few more pleasures. "Quick come; quick go!" sang the whirling wheels. "The niggard in pound and pence is a usurer in happiness; a miser driving a hard bargain with pleasure. Better burn the candle at both ends than not burn it at all! In one case, you get light; in the other nothing but darkness. Laughter is cheap at any price. A castle in the air is almost as durable as Solomon's temple. How soon--how soon both fade away!"

Thus ran the song of the wheels before them and behind them, as the soldier and Constance joined the desultory fag-end of the procession. On either side of the road waved the mournful cypress, draped by the hoary tillandsia, and from the somber depths of foliage came the chirp of the tree-crickets and the note of the swamp owl. Faint music, in measured rhythm, a foil to disconnected wood-sound, was wafted from a distant plantation.

"Wait!" said Constance.

He drew in the horses and silently they listened. Or, was he listening? His glance seemed bent so moodily--almost!--on space she concluded he was not. She stole a sidelong look at him.

"A penny for your thoughts!" she said gaily.

He started. "I was thinking how soon I might leave New Orleans."

"Leave New Orleans!" she repeated in surprise. "But I thought you intended staying here. Why have you changed your mind?"

Did he detect a subtle accent of regret in her voice? A deep flush mounted to his brow. He bent over her suddenly, eagerly.

"Would it matter--if I went?"

She drew back at the abruptness of his words.

"How unfair to answer one question with another!" she said lightly.

A pause fell between them. Perhaps she, too, felt the sudden repulse of her own answer and the ensuing constraint. Perhaps some compunction moved her to add in a voice not entirely steady:

"And so you think--of going back to France?"

"To France!" he repeated, quickly. "No"--and stopped.

Looking up, a half-questioning light in her eyes took flight to his, until suddenly arrested by the hard, set expression of his features. Abruptly chilled by she knew not what, her lashes fell. The horses

champed their bits and tugged at the reins, impatient of the prolonged pause.

"Let us go!" she said in a low, constrained voice.

At her words he turned, the harshness dropping from his face like a discarded mask; the lines of determination wavering.

"Let us go!" she said again, without looking up.

He made no motion to obey, until the sound of a vehicle behind them seemed to break the spell and mechanically he touched the horses with the whip.

CHAPTER IV

LEAR AND JULIET

Susan dismissed her admirers at the races with some difficulty, especially the tenacious marquis, who tenderly squeezed her hand, saying:

"Were I twenty years younger, I would not thus be set aside."

"Fie, Marquis!" she returned. "These other people are dull, while you are charmingly wicked."

"You flatter me," he cackled, detaining her, to the impatience of the thick-set man who was waiting to escort the young woman back to town. "But do you notice the gentleman over there with the medals?"

"The distinguished-looking man?" asked Susan.

"Yes; that is the Count de Propriac. It was he who was one of the agents of Louis Philippe in the Spanish double marriage plot. It was arranged the queen should marry her cousin, and her sister the son of Louis Philippe. The queen and her cousin were not expected to have children--but had them, to spite us all, and Louis Philippe's projects for the throne of Spain failed disastrously."

"How inconsiderate of the queen! Good afternoon, marquis! I have been vastly entertained."

"And I"--kissing her hand--"enamored!" Then, chuckling: "A week ago my stupid doctors had me laid out in funereal dignity, and now I am making love to a fine woman. Pretty pouting lips!"--tapping her chin playfully--"Like rose-buds! Happy the lover who shall gather the dew! But we meet again, Mistress Susan?"

"That will depend upon you, marquis," answered Susan, coquettishly, as a thought flashed through her mind that it would not be unpleasant to be called "Marquise," or "Marchioness"--she did not quite know which would be the proper title. It was nearly vesper-time with the old nobleman; he seemed but a procrastinating presence in the evening of mortal life; a chateau and carriage--

"Then we will meet again," said the marquis, interrupting these new-born ambitions.

"In that case you would soon get tired of me," laughed Susan.

"Never!" Tenderly. "When may I see you?"

"How importunate you are! Call when you will."

"But if you are out"--he insisted.

"That will make it the more delightfully uncertain," she said gaily.

"So it will!" Rubbing his hands. "Delightfully uncertain!" he repeated. And he departed with many protestations, taking no more notice of the thick-set man than if he were a block of wood.

"What an old ape!" growled the latter, viciously, as the marquis ambled from their stall.

"Do you think so?" answered Susan, tossing her head. "He has that air of distinction which only persons of rank and title can command."

"Distinction!" said the other, who was but a well-to-do merchant. "I should call it bad manners."

"Because he never noticed you!" laughed Susan, spitefully. "But why are we standing here? I believe you expect to take me home, don't you?"

Although she chattered like a magpie on the road, he was silent and sullen, nursing his injured pride and wounded self-sufficiency. Susan, who was interested in him for the novel reason she disliked him so heartily, parted from him with the air of a duchess, and entered the hotel, holding her head so high that he swore under his breath as he

drove away. And, as a result of the quarrel with the lad, he would probably have to risk being "pinked" for this jade! Susan, on the other hand, was as happy as a lark when she entered the dining-room of the St. Charles, that great eating-place and meeting-place of all classes of people.

As she seated herself at a table, a smile lurked around the corners of her mouth and flickered faintly upon the waiter who forthwith became a Mercury for expedition and a prodigal for variety. Her quarrel on the road with her companion had in nowise interfered with that appetite which the fresh air and the lateness of the hour had provoked, nor were her thoughts of a character to deter from the zest of eating.

From the present to the past was but an instant's flight of the mind--thus may the once august years swiftly and unceremoniously be marshaled by!--and she dwelt in not unpleasing retrospection on an endless field of investigation and discovery and the various experiences which had befallen her in arriving at the present period of mature knowledge; a proficiency which converted her chosen researches into an exact science.

Thus meditating and dining--counting on her fingers twice over the fair actresses who had become titled ladies, and enviously disbelieving she would join that triumphant company--Susan was still seated at the table some time later when the soldier glanced in. Imperatively she motioned him to her side and he obeyed with

not entirely concealed reluctance, and was so preoccupied, she rallied him upon his reserve.

"I believe you and Constance had a quarrel on the road." Maliciously. "I hope you were more amiable than my companion. He hardly spoke a word, and, when I left him"--her voice sank to a whisper--"I heard him swear."

"He pleased you so much earlier in the day that a duel will probably be the outcome."

Susan laughed gaily.

"A duel! Then my fortune is made. All the newspapers will contain paragraphs. It is too good to be true." And she clapped her hands. "When is it to take place? Tell me about it!"

Then noting his manner, she continued with an assumption of plaintiveness: "Now you are cross with me! You think me heartless. Is it my fault? I care nothing for either of them and I am not to be blamed if they are so foolish. It might be different if either had touched my heart." And she assumed a coquettish demeanor, while Saint-Prosper coolly studied her through the wreaths of smoke from his weed.

"You are wondering what sort of a person I am!" she continued,

merrily, raising her glass of wine with: "To unrequited passion!"

Her roguish face sparkled as he asked; "Whose?"

She drained the glass and set it down demurely. "Mine!"

The cigar was suspended; the veil cleared between them.

"For whom?" he said.

"You!" Offering him the limpid depths of her blue eyes. "Is my liking returned?"

"Liking? Perhaps!"

"My love?"

"Love? No." Coldly.

"You do not fear a woman scorned?" Her lips curved in a smile, displaying her faultless teeth.

"Not when the avenging angel is so charming and so heartless!" he added satirically.

Her lashes veiled the azure orbs.

"You think to disarm her with a compliment? How well you understand women!" And, as he rose, the pressure of the hand she gave him at parting was lingering.

* * * * *

Above in his room, Barnes, with plays and manuscripts scattered around him, was engaged in writing in his note and date book, wherein autobiography, ledger and journal accounts, and such miscellaneous matter mingled indiscriminately. "To-day she said to me: 'I am going to the races with Mr. Saint-Prosper.' What did I say? 'Yes,' of course. What can there be in common between Lear and Juliet? Naturally, she sometimes turns from an old fellow like me--now, if she were only a slip of a girl again--with her short frock--her disorder of long ringlets--running and romping--

"A thousand details pass through my mind, reminiscences of her girlhood, lightening a lonesome life like glimmerings of sunshine in a secluded wood; memories of her mother and the old days when she played in my New York theater--for Barnes, the stroller, was once a metropolitan manager! Her fame had preceded her and every admirer of histrionic art eagerly awaited her arrival.

"But the temple of art is a lottery. The town that had welcomed her so wildly now went Elssler-mad. The gossamer floatings of this French

danseuse possessed everyone. People courted trash and trumpery. Greatness gave way to triviality. This pitiful condition preyed upon her. The flame of genius never for a moment became less dim, but her eyes grew larger, brighter, more melancholy. Sometimes she would fall into a painful reverie and I knew too well the subject of her thoughts. With tender solicitude she would regard her daughter, thinking, thinking! She was her only hope, her only joy!

"'The town wants dancers, not tragedians, Mr. Barnes,' she said sadly one day.

"'Nonsense,' I replied. 'The town wants a change of bill. We will put on a new piece next week.'

"'It will be but substituting one tragedy for another,' she retorted. 'One misfortune for a different one! You should import a rival dancer. You are going down; down hill! I will leave you; perhaps you will discover your dancer, and your fortune is made!'

"'And you? What would you do?' I demanded. 'And your child?'

"At this her eyes filled and she could not answer. 'And now, Madam,' I said firmly, 'I refuse once and for all to permit you to break your contract. Pooh! The tide will change. Men and women are sometimes fools; but they are not fools all the time. The dancer will have had her day. She will twirl her toes to the empty seats and throw her

kisses into unresponsive space. Our patrons will gradually return; they will grow tired of wriggling and twisting, and look again for a more substantial diet.'

"Matters did, indeed, begin to mend somewhat, when to bring the whole fabric tumbling down on our heads, this incomparable woman fell ill.

"'You see? I have ruined you,' she said sadly.

"'I am honored, Madam,' was all I could reply.

"She placed her hand softly on mine and let her luminous eyes rest on me.

"'Dear old friend!' she murmured.

"Then she closed her eyes and I thought she was sleeping. Some time elapsed when she again opened them.

"'Death will break our contract, Mr. Barnes,' she said softly.

"I suppose my hand trembled, for she tightened her grasp and continued firmly: 'It is not so terrible, after all, or would not be, but for one thing.'

"'You will soon get well, Madam,' I managed to stammer.

"'No! Do you care? It is pleasant to have one true, kind friend in the world; one who makes a woman believe again in the nobility of human nature. My life has been sad as you know. I should not regret giving it up. Nor should I fear to die. I can not think that God will be unkind to one who has done her best; at least, has tried to. Yet there is one thing that makes me crave for life. My child--what will she do--poor, motherless, fatherless girl--all alone, all alone--.

"'Madam, if I may--will you permit me to care for her? If I might regard her as my child!'

"How tightly she held my hand at that! Her eyes seemed to blaze with heavenly fire. But let me not dwell further upon the sad events that led to the end of her noble career. Something of her life I had heard; something, I surmised. Unhappy as a woman, she was majestic as an actress; the fire of her voice struck every ear; its sweetness had a charm, never to be forgotten. But only to those who knew her well were revealed the unvarying truth and simplicity of her nature. Even as I write, her spirit, tender and steadfast, seems standing by my side; I feel her eyes in the darkness of night, and, when the time comes--and often of late, it has seemed not far--to go from this mere dressing-room, the earth, into the higher life--"

A knock at the door rudely dispelled these memories. For a moment the manager looked startled, as one abruptly called back to his immediate

surroundings; then the pen fell from his hand, and he pushed the book from him to the center of the table.

"Come in," he said.

The door opened and Saint-Prosper entered.

"Am I interrupting you?" asked the soldier, glancing at the littered table.

"Not at all," answered the manager, recovering himself, and settling back in his chair. "Make yourself at home. You'll find some cigars on the mantel, or if you prefer your pipe, there's a jar of tobacco on the trunk. Do you find it? I haven't had time yet to bring order out of chaos. A manager's trunks are like a junk-shop, with everything from a needle to an anchor."

Filling his pipe from the receptacle indicated, which lay among old costumes and wigs, the soldier seated himself near an open window that looked out upon a balcony. Through a door at the far end of the balcony a light streamed from a chandelier within, playing upon the balustrade. Once the figure of the young actress stepped for a moment out upon the balcony; she leaned upon the balustrade, looked across the city, breathed the perfume of the flowers, and then quickly vanished.

"Can you spare me a little time to-morrow morning--early--before rehearsal?" said Saint-Prosper, finally.

"Yes," returned the manager, in surprise. "What is it?"

"A foolish piece of business! The patroon is in New Orleans."

Barnes uttered an exclamation of annoyance and apprehension. "Here! What is he doing here?" he said. "I thought we had seen the last of him. Has he followed--Constance?"

"I don't know. We met yesterday at the races."

"It is strange she did not tell me about it," remarked the manager, without endeavoring to conceal the anxiety this unexpected information afforded him.

"She does not know he is here." And Saint-Prosper briefly related the circumstances of his meeting with the land baron, to which the manager listened attentively.

"And so she must be dragged into it?" exclaimed Barnes at length, resentfully. "Her name must become public property in a broil?"

A frown darkened the soldier's face, but he replied quickly: "Need any one know? The land baron has not been seen with her."

"No; but you have," returned the manager, suddenly pausing and looking down at the other.

The silence between them lasted for some moments. Barnes stood with his hands in his pockets, his face downcast and moody. He felt that events were happening over which he had no control, but which were shaping the destiny of all he loved best. In the dim light the rugged lines of his countenance were strongly, decisively outlined. Turning to the trunk, with a quick, nervous step, he filled a pipe himself. After he had lighted it, he once more contemplated the soldier, thinking deeply, reviewing the past.

"We have been together for some time, Mr. Saint-Prosper," he said, at length. "We have gone through fair and rough weather, and"--he paused a moment before continuing--"should understand each other. You asked me when you came in if you were interrupting me, and I told you that you were not. As a matter of fact, you were."

And, walking to a table, Barnes took up the notebook.

"A garrulous, single man must tell his little secrets somewhere," he continued. "Will you look at the pages I was writing when you came in?"

Saint-Prosper took the book, and, while he was turning the leaves that

were hardly dry, the manager relighted his pipe, over which he glanced nervously from time to time at his companion. Finally, when the soldier had finished the perusal of the diary, Barnes turned to him expectantly, but the other silently laid down the little volume, and, after waiting some moments for him to speak, the manager, as though disappointed by his reticence, breathed a sigh. Then, clearing his throat, in a voice somewhat husky, he went on, simply:

"You will understand now why she is so much to me. I have always wanted to keep her from the world as much as possible; to have her world, her art! I have tried to keep the shadow of the past from her. An actress has a pretty face; and there's a hue and cry! It is not notoriety she seeks, but fame; fame, bright and pure as sunlight!"

"The land baron will not cry abroad the cause of the meeting," said the soldier, gravely. "These fashionable affairs need but flimsy pretexts."

"Flimsy pretexts!" cried Barnes. "A woman's reputation--her good name--"

"Hush!" said Saint-Prosper.

From the door at the far end of the balcony Constance had again emerged and now approached their room. A flowing gown of an early

period surrounded her like a cloud as she paused before Barnes' apartment. At the throat a deep-falling collar was closely fastened; the sleeves were gathered in at elbow and wrist, and from a "coverchief," set upon the dusky hair, fell a long veil of ample proportions. With the light shimmering on the folds of her raiment, she stood looking through the open door, regarding the manager and Saint-Prosper.

"Oh, you are not alone?" she said to the former. "You look as though you were talking together very seriously?" she added, turning to Saint-Prosper.

"Nothing of consequence, Miss Carew!" he replied, flushing beneath her clear eyes.

"Only about some scenery!" interposed the manager, so hastily that she glanced, slightly surprised, from the one to the other. "Some sets that are--"

"'Flimsy pretexts!' I caught that much! I only wanted to ask you about this costume. Is it appropriate, do you think, for the part we were talking about?" Turning around slowly, with arms half-raised.

"Charming, my dear; charming!" he answered, enthusiastically.

"If I only thought that an unbiased criticism!" Her dark lashes

lowered; she looked toward the soldier, half shyly, half mockingly. "What do you think, Mr. Saint-Prosper?"

At that moment her girlish grace was irresistible.

"I think it is not only appropriate, but"--looking at her and not at the costume--"beautiful!"

A gleam like laughter came into her eyes; nor did she shun his kindling gaze.

"Thank you!" she said, and courtesied low.

* * * * *

That same evening Spedella's fencing rooms were fairly thronged with devotees of the ancient art of puncturing. The master of the place was a tall Italian, lank and lean, all bone and muscle, with a Don Quixote visage, barring a certain villainous expression of the eyes, irreconcilable with the chivalrous knight-errant of distressed Dulcineas. But every man with a bad eye is not necessarily a rascallion, and Spedella, perhaps, was better than he looked. With a most melancholy glance he was now watching two combatants, novices in feats of arms. Dejection sat upon his brow; he yawned over a clumsy feinte seconde, when his sinister eyes fell on a figure that had

just entered the hall. Immediately his melancholy vanished, and he advanced to meet the newcomer with stately cordiality.

"Well met, Mr. Mauville," he exclaimed, extending a bony hand that had fingers like the grip of death. "What good fortune brought you here?"

"An ill wind, Spedella, rather!"

"It's like a breath of the old days to see you; the old days before you began your wanderings!"

"Get the foils, Spedella; I'll have a bout with the master. Gad, you're as ill-looking as ever! It's some time since I've touched a foil. I want to test myself. I have a little affair to-morrow. Hark you, my old brigand; I wish to see if I can kill him!"

"A lad of spirit!" chuckled the master, a gleam of interest illumining his cavernous eyes. "Young!--frisky!--an affair of honor to-day is but nursery sport. Two children with tin swords are more diverting. The world goes backward! A counter-jumper thinks he can lunge, because he is spry, that he can touch a button because he sells them. And I am wasting my genius with ribbon-venders--"

"I see the wolf growls as much as ever!" said the patroon. "Here's a quiet corner. Come; tell me what I've forgotten."

"Good!" returned the other. "You can tell me about your travels as we fence."

"Hang my travels!" replied the patroon, as they leisurely engaged. "They've brought me nothing but regrets."

"Feinte flanconnade--well done!" murmured Spedella. "So it was not honey you brought home from your rambles? Feinte seconde and decisive tierce! It's long since I've touched a good blade. These glove-sellers and perfume-dealers--"

"You are bitter against trade, my bravo," remarked the land baron.

"I was spoiling with languor when you came. Not bad, that feint--but dangerous, because of the possibility of misjudging the attack. Learn the paroles he affects to-morrow by quick, simple thrusts, and then you will know what feints to attack him with. Time in octave--you quitted the blade in a dangerous position. Cluck; cluck, my game cock! Intemperance has befogged your judgment; high-living has dimmed your--"

"You have it!" laughed the land baron.

The button of his foil touched the old bravo's breast; the steel was bent like a bow.

Spedella forgot his English and swore in soft and liquid Italian. "I looked around to see how those ribbon-venders were getting on," he said after this euphonious, foreign prelude. "They pay me; I have to keep an eye on them. All the same," he added, generously, "there isn't another man in New Orleans could have stopped that stroke--except myself!"

"Will I do--for to-morrow?" asked the patroon, moodily.

The master cocked his head quizzically; his deep-set eyes were soft and friendly.

"The devil's with him, if you don't put your spur in him, my bantam!"

CHAPTER V

THE MEETING BENEATH THE OAKS

The mist was lifting from the earth and nature lay wrapped in the rosy peace of daybreak as the sun's shafts of gold pierced the foliage, illumining the historic ground of the Oaks. Like shining lances, they gleamed from the interstices in the leafy roof to the dew-bejeweled sward. From this stronghold of glistening arms, however, the surrounding country stretched tranquil and serene. Upon a neighboring bank sheep were browsing; in the distance cow-bells tinkled, and the drowsy cowherds followed the cattle, faithful as the shepherds who tended their flocks on the Judean hills.

Beneath the spreading trees were assembled a group of persons variously disposed. A little dapper man was bending over a case of instruments, as merry a soul as ever adjusted a ligature or sewed a wound. Be-ribboned and be-medaled, the Count de Propriac, acting for the land baron, and Barnes, who had accompanied the soldier, were consulting over the weapons, a magnificent pair of rapiers with costly steel guards, set with initials and a coronet. Member of an ancient society of France which yet sought to perpetuate the memory of the old judicial combat and the more modern duel, the count was one of those persons who think they are in honor bound to bear a challenge, without questioning the cause, or asking the "color of a reason."

"A superb pair of weapons, count!" observed the doctor, rising.

"Yes," said the person addressed, holding the blade so that the sunlight ran along the steel; "the same Jacques Legres and I fought with!"

Here the count smiled in a melancholy manner, which left no doubt regarding the fate of the hapless Jacques. But after a moment he supplemented this indubitable assurance by adding specifically:

"The left artery of the left lung!"

"Bless my soul!" commented the medical man. "But what is this head in gold beneath the guard?"

"Saint Michael, the patron saint of duelists!" answered the count.

"Patron!" exclaimed the doctor. "Well, all I have to say is, it is a saintless business for Michael."

The count laughed and turned away with a business-like air.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?"

At his words the contestants immediately took their positions. The

land baron, lithe and supple, presented a picture of insolent and conscious pride, his glance lighted by disdain, but smoldering with fiercer passions as he examined and tested his blade.

"Engage!" exclaimed the count.

With ill-concealed eagerness, Mauville began a vigorous, although guarded attack, as if asserting his supremacy, and at the same time testing his man. The buzzing switch of the steel became angrier; the weapons glinted and gleamed, intertwining silently and separating with a swish. The patroon's features glowed; his movements became quicker, and, executing a rapid parry, he lunged with a thrust so stealthy his blade was beaten down only as it touched the soldier's breast.

Mauville smiled, but Barnes groaned inwardly, feeling his courage and confidence fast oozing from him. Neither he nor the other spectators doubted the result. Strength would count but little against such agility; the land baron was an incomparable swordsman.

"Gad!" muttered the count to himself. "It promises to be short and sweet."

As if to demonstrate the verity of this assertion, Mauville suddenly followed his momentary advantage with a dangerous lunge from below. Involuntarily Barnes looked away, but his wandering attention was immediately recalled. From the lips of the land baron burst an

exclamation of mingled pain and anger. Saint-Prosper had not only parried the thrust, but his own blade, by a rapid riposte, had grazed the shoulder of his foe.

Nor was the manager's surprise greater than that of the count. The latter, amazed this unusual strategem should have failed when directed by a wrist as trained and an eye as quick as Mauville's, now interposed.

"Enough!" he exclaimed, separating the contestants. "Demme! it was superb. Honor has been satisfied."

"It is nothing!" cried the land baron, fiercely. "His blade hardly touched me." In his exasperation and disappointment over his failure, Mauville was scarcely conscious of his wound. "I tell you it is nothing," he repeated.

"What do you say, Mr. Saint-Prosper?" asked the count.

"I am satisfied," returned the young man, coldly.

"But I'm not!" reiterated the patroon, restraining himself with difficulty. "It was understood we should continue until both were willing to stop!"

"No," interrupted the count, suavely; "it was understood you should

continue, if both were willing!"

"And you're not!" exclaimed the land baron, wheeling on Saint-Prosper. "Did you leave the army because--"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen! let us observe the proprieties!" expostulated the count. "Is it your intention, sir"--to Saint-Prosper--"not to grant my principal's request?"

A fierce new anger gleamed from the soldier's eyes, completely transforming his expression and bearing. His glance quickly swept from the count to Mauville at the studied insult of the latter's words; on his cheek burned a dark red spot.

"Let it go on!"

The count stepped nimbly from his position between the two men. Again the swords crossed. The count's glance bent itself more closely on the figure of the soldier; noting now how superbly poised was his body; what reserves of strength were suggested by the white, muscular arm! His wrist moved like a machine, lightly brushing aside the thrusts. Had it been but accident that Mauville's unlooked-for expedient had failed?

"The devil!" thought the count, watching the soldier. "Here is a fellow who has deceived us all."

But the land baron's zest only appeared to grow in proportion to the resistance he encountered; the lust for fighting increased with the music of the blades. For some moments he feinted and lunged, seeking an opening, however slight. Again he appeared bent upon forcing a quick conclusion, for suddenly with a rush he sought to break over Saint-Prosper's guard, and succeeded in wounding the other slightly in the forehead. Now sure of his man, Mauville sprang at him savagely.

But dashing the blood from his eyes with his free hand, and without giving way, Saint-Prosper met the assault with a wrist of iron, and the land baron failed to profit by what had seemed a certain advantage. The wound had the effect of making the soldier more cautious, and eye, foot and hand were equally true. Mauville was breathing heavily from his exertions, but the appearance of both men, the supple movements of the one contrasting with the perfect precision of the other, would have delighted those members of the count's society, who regarded these matches as leading to a renaissance of chivalry.

In his fury that his chance had slipped away, after wounding, and, as he supposed, blinding his opponent, Mauville, throwing prudence to the winds, recklessly attempted to repeat his rash expedient, and this time the steel of his antagonist gleamed like quicksilver, passing beneath his arm and inflicting a slight flesh wound. Something resembling a look of apprehension crossed the land baron's face. "I

have underestimated him!" he thought. "The next stroke will be driven nearer home."

He felt no fear, however; only mute, helpless rage. In the soldier's hand the dainty weapon was a thing of marvelous cunning; his vastly superior strength made him practically tireless in this play. Not only tireless; he suddenly accelerated the tempo of the exercise, but behind this unexpected, even passionate, awakening, the spectators felt an unvarying accuracy, a steely coldness of purpose. The blades clicked faster; they met and parted more viciously; the hard light in Saint-Prosper's eyes grew brighter as he slowly thrust back his antagonist.

Mauville became aware his own vigor was slowly failing him; instead of pressing the other he was now obliged to defend himself. He strove to throw off the lethargy irresistibly stealing over him; to shake the leaden movements from his limbs. He vainly endeavored to penetrate the mist falling before his eyes and to overcome the dizziness that made his foeman seem like a figure in a dream. Was it through loss of blood, or weariness, or both?--but he was cognizant his thrusts had lost force, his plunges vitality, and that even an element of chance prevailed in his parries. But he uttered no sound. When would that mist become dark, and the golden day fuse into inky night?

Before the mist totally eclipsed his sight he determined to make one more supreme effort, and again sprang forward, but was driven back

with ease. The knowledge that he was continuing a futile struggle smote him to the soul. Gladly would he have welcomed the fatal thrust, if first he could have sent his blade through that breast which so far had been impervious to his efforts. Now the scene went round and round; the golden day became crimson, scarlet; then gray, leaden, somber. Incautiously he bent his arm to counter an imaginary lunge, and his antagonist thrust out his rapier like a thing of life, transfixing Mauville's sword arm. He stood his ground bravely for a moment, playing feebly into space, expecting the fatal stroke! When would it come? Then the slate-colored hues were swallowed in a black cloud. But while his mind passed into unconsciousness, his breast was openly presented to his antagonist, and even the count shuddered.

With his blade at guard, Saint-Prosper remained motionless; the land baron staggered feebly and then sank softly to the earth. That fatal look, the expression of a duelist, vanished from the soldier's face, and, allowing the point of his weapon to drop to the ground, he surveyed his prostrate antagonist.

"Done like a gentleman!" cried the count, breathing more freely. "You had him at your mercy, sir"--to Saint-Prosper--"and spared him."

A cold glance was the soldier's only response, as without a word he turned brusquely away. Meanwhile the doctor, hastening to Mauville's side, opened his shirt.

"He is badly hurt?" asked Barnes, anxiously, of the surgeon.

"No; only fainted from loss of blood," replied that gentleman, cheerfully. "He will be around again in a day or two."

The count put away his blades as carefully as a mother would deposit her babe in the cradle.

"Another page of history, my chicks!" he observed. "Worthy of the song of Pindar!"

"Why not Straws or Phazma?" queried the surgeon, looking up from his task.

"Would you have the press take up the affair? There are already people who talk of abolishing dueling. When they do they will abolish reputation with it. And what's a gentleman got but his honor--demme!" And the royal emissary carefully brushed a crimson stain from the bespattered saint.

By this time the land baron had regained consciousness, and, his wounds temporarily bandaged, walked, with the assistance of the count, to his carriage. As they were about to drive away the sound of a vehicle was heard drawing near, and soon it appeared followed by another equipage. Both stopped at the confines of the Oaks and the friends of the thick-set man--Susan's admirer--and the young lad, on

whom she had smiled, alighted.

"Ha!" exclaimed the doctor, who had accompanied the count and his companion to the carriage. "Number two!"

"Yes," laughed the count, as he leaned back against the soft cushions, "it promises to be a busy day at the Oaks! Really"--as the equipage rolled on--"New Orleans is fast becoming a civilized center--demme!"

CHAPTER VI

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

The land baron's injuries did not long keep him indoors, for it was his pride rather than his body that had received deep and bitter wounds. He chafed and fumed when he thought how, in all likelihood, the details of his defeat could not be suppressed in the clubs and cafés. This anticipated publicity he took in ill part, fanning his mental disorder with brandy, mellow and insidious with age. But beneath the dregs of indulgence lay an image which preyed upon his mind more than his defeat beneath the Oaks: a figure, on the crude stage of a country tavern; in the manor window, with an aureole around her from the sinking sun; in the grand stand at the races, the gay dandies singling her out in all that seraglio of beauty.

"I played him too freely," he groaned to the Count de Propriac, as the latter sat contemplatively nursing the ivory handle of his cane and offering the land baron such poor solace as his company afforded. "I misjudged the attack, besides exposing myself too much. If I could only meet him again!"

The visitor reflectively took the handle of the stick from his lips, thrust out his legs and yawned. The count was sleepy, having drowned dull care the night before, and had little sympathy with such spirited

talk so early in the day. His lack-luster gaze wandered to the pictures on the wall, the duel between two court ladies for the possession of the Duc de Richelieu and an old print of the deadly public contest of François de Vivonne and Guy de Jarnac and then strayed languidly to the other paraphernalia of a high-spirited bachelor's rooms--foils, dueling pistols and masks--trappings that but served to recall to the land baron his defeat.

"It would be like running against a stone wall," said the count, finally; "demme if it wouldn't! He could have killed you!"

"Why didn't he do it, then?" demanded the land baron, fiercely.

The count shrugged his shoulders, drank his brandy, and handed the bottle to his companion, who helped himself, as though not averse to that sort of medicine for his physical and mental ailments.

"What's the news?" he asked abruptly, sinking back on his pillow.

"The levees are flooded."

"Hanged if I care if it's another deluge!" said Mauville. "I mean news of the town, not news of the river."

"There's a new beauty come to town--a brunette; all the bloods are talking about her. Where did she come from? Who is she? These are

some of the questions asked. But she's a Peri, at any rate! shy, hard to get acquainted with--at first! An actress--Miss Carew!"

The glass trembled in the patroon's hand. "Do you know her?" he asked unsteadily.

Smiling, the visitor returned the cane to his lips and gazed into vacancy, as though communing with agreeable thoughts.

"I have met her," he said finally. "Yes; I may say I have met her. Ged! Next to a duel with rapiers is one with eyes. They thrust at you; you parry; they return, and, demme! you're stabbed! But don't ask me any more--discretion--you understand--between men of the world--demme!"--and the count relapsed into a vacuous dream.

"What a precious liar he is!" commented the land baron to himself. But his mind soon reverted to the duel once more. "If I had only followed Spedella's advice and studied his favorite parades!" he muttered, regretfully.

"It would have been the same," retorted the count, brutally. "When you lost your temper, you lost your cause. Your work was brilliant; but he is one of the best swordsmen I ever saw. Who is he, anyway?"

"All I know is, he served in Algiers," said Mauville, moodily.

"A demmed adventurer, probably!" exclaimed the other.

"I'd give a good deal to know his record," remarked the patroon, contemplatively. "You should be pretty well acquainted with the personnel of the army?"

"It includes everybody nowadays," replied the diplomat. "I have a large acquaintance, but I am not a directory. A person who knows everybody usually knows nobody--worth knowing! But it seems to me I did know of a Saint-Prosper at the military college at Saumur; or was it at the Ecole d'application d'état-major? Demmed scapegrace, if I am not mistaken; sent to Algiers; must be the same. A hell-rake hole!--full of German and French outcasts! Knaves, adventureres, ready for plunder and loot!"

Here the count, after this outburst, closed his eyes and seemed almost on the point of dropping off, but suddenly straightened himself.

"Let's get the cards, or the dice, Mauville," he said, "or I'll fall into a doze. Such a demmed sleepy climate!"

Soon the count was shuffling and the land baron and he were playing bezique, but in spite of the latter's drowsiness, he won steadily from his inattentive companion, and, although the noble visitor had some difficulty in keeping his eyes open, what there was of his glance was vigilantly concentrated on his little pile of the coin of the realm.

His watchfulness did not relax nor his success desert him, until Mauville finally threw down the cards in disgust, weary alike of such poor luck and the half-nodding automaton confronting him; whereupon the count thrust every piece of gold carefully away in his pocket, absently reached for his hat, drawled a perfunctory farewell and departed in a brown study.

The count's company, of which he had enjoyed a good deal during the past forty-eight hours, did not improve Mauville's temper, and he bore his own reflections so grudgingly that inaction became intolerable. Besides, certain words of his caller concerning Saint-Prosper had stimulated his curiosity, and, in casting about for a way to confirm his suspicions, he had suddenly determined in what wise to proceed. Accordingly, the next day he left his rooms, his first visit being to a spacious, substantial residence of stone and lime, with green veranda palings and windows that opened as doors, with a profusion of gauzy curtains hanging behind them. This house, the present home of the Marquis de Ligne, stood in the French quarter, contrasting architecturally with the newer brick buildings erected for the American population. The land baron was ushered into a large reception room, sending his card to the marquis by the neat-appearing colored maid who answered the door.

If surroundings indicate the man, the apartments in which the visitor stood spoke eloquently of the marquis' taste. Eschewing the stiff, affected classicalism of the Empire style, the furniture was the best

work of André Boule and Riesener; tables, with fine marquetry of the last century, made of tulip wood and mahogany; mirrors from Tourlaville; couches with tapestry woven in fanciful designs after Fragonard, in the looms of Beauvais--couches that were made for conversation, not repose; cabinets exemplifying agreeable disposition of lines and masses in the inlaid adornment, containing tiny drawers that fitted with old-time exactness, and, without jamming, opened and shut at the touch. The marquis' character was stamped by these details; it was old, not new France, to which he belonged.

Soon the marquis' servant, a stolid, sober man, of virtuous deportment, came down stairs to inform the land baron his master had suffered a relapse and was unable to see any one.

"Last night his temperature was very high," said the valet. "My master is very ill; more so than I have known him to be in twenty years."

"You have served the marquis so long?" said the visitor, pausing as he was leaving the room. "Do you remember the Saint-Prosper family?"

"Well, Monsieur. General Saint-Prosper and my master were distant kinsmen and had adjoining lands."

"Surely the marquis did not pass his time in the country?" observed Mauville.

"He preferred it to Paris--when my lady was there!" added François, softly.

In spite of his ill-humor, the shadow of a smile gleamed in the land baron's gaze, and, encouraged by that questioning look, the man continued: "The marquis and General Saint-Prosper were always together. My lady had her own friends."

"So I've heard," commented the listener.

François' discreet eyes were downcast. Why did the visitor wish to learn about the Saint-Prosper family? Why, instead of going, did he linger and eye the man half-dubiously? François had sold so many of his master's secrets he scented his opportunities with a sixth sense.

"The marquis and General Saint-Prosper were warm friends?" asked the land baron at length.

"Yes, Monsieur; the death of the latter was a severe shock to the Marquis de Ligne, but, mon Dieu!"--lifting his eyes--"it was as well he did not live to witness the disgrace of his son."

"His son's disgrace," repeated the land baron, eagerly. "Oh, you mean running in debt--gaming--some such fashionable virtue?"

"If betraying his country is a fashionable virtue," replied the valet.

"He is a traitor."

Incredulity overspread the land baron's features; then, coincident with the assertion, came remembrance of his conversation with the marquis.

"He certainly called him that," ruminated the visitor. Not only the words, but the expression of the old nobleman's face recurred to him. What did it mean unless it confirmed the deliberate charge of the valet? The land baron forgot his disappointment over his inability to see the marquis, and began to look with more favor on the man.

"He surrendered a French stronghold," continued the servant, softly. "Not through fear; oh, no; but for ambition, power, under Abd-el-Kader, the Moorish leader."

"How do you know this?" said the patroon, sharply.

"My master has the report of the military board of inquiry," replied the man, steadily.

"Why has the matter attracted no public attention, if a board of inquiry was appointed?"

"The board was a secret one, and the report was suppressed. Few have seen it, except the late King of France and my master."

"And yourself, François?" said the patroon, his manner changing.

"Oh, Monsieur!" Deprecatorily.

"Since it has been inspected by such good company, I confess curiosity to look at it myself. But your master is ill; I can not speak with him; perhaps you--"

"I, Monsieur!" Indignantly.

"For five hundred francs, François?"

Like oil upon the troubled waters, this assurance wrought a swift change in the valet's manner.

"To oblige Monsieur!" he answered, softly, but his eyes gleamed like a lynx's. His stateliness was a sham; his perfidy and hypocrisy surprised even the land baron.

"You have no compunctions about selling a reputation, François?"

"Reputation is that!" said the man, contemptuously snapping his fingers, emboldened by his compact with the caller. "Francs and sous are everything."

"Lord, how servants imbibe the ideas of their betters!" quoth the patroon, as he left the house and strode down the graveled walk, decapitating the begonias with his cane.

Furtively the valet watched his departing figure. "Why does he want it?" he thought.

Then he shrugged his shoulders. "What do I care!"

"François!" piped a shrill and querulous treble from above, dispelling the servant's conjectures.

"Coming, my lord!" And the valet slowly mounted the broad stairway amid a fusillade of epithets from the sick chamber. An hour before the marquis had ordered him out of his sight as vehemently as now he summoned him, all of which François endured with infinite patience and becoming humility.

Passing into the Rue Royale, the favorite promenade of the Creole-French, the land baron went on through various thoroughfares with French-English nomenclature into St. Charles Street, reaching his apartments, which adjoined a well-known club. He was glad to stretch himself once more on his couch, feeling fatigued from his efforts, and having rather overtaxed his strength.

But if his body was now inert, his mind was active. His thoughts

dwelt upon the soldier's reticence, his disinclination to make acquaintances, and the coldness with which he had received his, Mauville's, advances in the Shadengo Valley. Why, asked Mauville, lying there and putting the pieces of the tale together, did not Saint-Prosper remain with his new-found friends, the enemies of his country? Because, came the answer, Abd-el-Kader, the patriot of Algerian independence, had been captured and the subjection of the country had followed. Since Algeria had become a French colony, where could Saint-Prosper have found a safer asylum than in America? Where more secure from "that chosen curse" for the man who owes his weal to his country's woe?

In his impatience to possess the promised proof, the day passed all too slowly. He even hoped the count would call, although that worthy brought with him all the "flattering devils, sweet poison and deadly sins" of inebriation. But the count, like a poor friend, was absent when wanted, and it was a distinct relief to the land baron when François appeared at his apartments in the evening with a buff-colored envelope, which he handed to him.

"The suppressed report?" asked the latter, weighing it in his hand.

"No, Monsieur; I could not find that. My master must have destroyed it."

The land baron made a gesture of disappointment and irritation.

"But this," François hastened to add, "is a letter from the Duc d'Aumale, governor of Algeria, to the Marquis de Ligne, describing the affair. Monsieur will find it equally as satisfactory, I am sure."

"How did you get it?" said the patroon, thoughtfully.

"My master left the keys on the dresser."

"And if he misses this letter--"

"Oh, Monsieur, I grieve my master is so ill he could not miss anything but his ailments! Those he would willingly dispense with. My poor master!"

"There! Take your long, hypocritical face out of my sight!" said Mauville, curtly, at the same time handing him the promised reward, which François calmly accepted. A moment later, however, he drew himself up.

"Monsieur has not paid for the right to libel my character," he said.

"Your character!"

"My character, Monsieur!" the valet replied firmly, and bowed in the stateliest fashion of the old school as he backed out of the room with

grand obsequiousness. Deliberately, heavily and solidly, resounded the echoing footsteps of François upon the stairway, like the going of some substantial personage of unimpeachable rectitude.

As the front door closed sharply the land baron threw the envelope on the table and quietly surveyed it, the remnants of his pride rising in revolt.

"Have I then sunk so low as to read private communications or pry into family secrets? Is it a family secret, though? Should it not become common property? Why have they protected him? Did the marquis wish to spare the son of an old friend? Besides"--his glance again seeking the envelope--"it is my privilege to learn whether I have fought with a gentleman or a renegade." But even as he meditated, he felt the sophistry of this last argument, while through his brain ran the undercurrent: "He has wooed her--won her, perhaps!" Passion, rather than injured hauteur, stirred him. At the same time a great indignation filled his breast; how Saint-Prosper had tricked her and turned her from himself!

And moving from the mantel upon which he was leaning, Mauville strode to the table and untied the envelope.

CHAPTER VII

A CYNICAL BARD

A dusty window looking out upon a dusty thoroughfare; a dusty room, lighted by the dusty window, and revealing a dusty chair, a dusty carpet and--probably--a dusty bed! Over the foot and the head of the bed the lodger's wardrobe lay carelessly thrown. He had but to reach up, and lo! his shirt was at hand; to reach down, and there were collar and necktie! Presto, he was dressed, without getting out of bed, running no risk from cold floors for cold feet, lurking tacks or stray needles and pins! On every side appeared evidence of confusion, or a bachelor's idea of order.

Fastened to the head-board of the bed was a box, wherein were stored various and divers articles and things. With as little inconvenience as might be imagined the lodger could plunge his hand into his cupboard and pull out a pipe, a box of matches, a bottle of ink, a bottle of something else, paper and pins, and, last but not least, his beloved tin whistle of three holes, variously dignified a fretiau, a frestele, or a galoubet, upon which he played ravishing tunes.

Oh, a wonderful box was Straws' little bedstead cupboard! As Phazma said of it, it contained everything it should not, and nothing it should contain. But that was why it was a poet's box. If it had held a

Harpagon's Interest Computer, instead of a well-thumbed Virgil, or Oldcodger's Commercial Statistics for 184--, instead of an antique, leather-covered Montaigne, Straws would have had no use for the cupboard. It was at once his library--a scanty one, for the poet held tenaciously to but a few books--his sideboard, his secrétaire, his music cabinet--giving lodgment in this last capacity to a single work, "The Complete and Classical Preceptor for Galoubet, Containing Tunes, Polkas and Military Pieces."

Suspended from the ceiling hung a wooden cage, confining a mocking bird that had become acclimated to the death-dealing atmosphere of tobacco smoke, alcoholic fumes and poetry. All these the songster had endured and survived, nay, thriven upon, lifting up its voice in happy cadence and blithely hopping about its prison, the door of which Straws sometimes opened, permitting the feathered captive the dubious freedom of the room. Pasted on the foot-board of the bed was an old engraving of a wandering musician mountebank, playing a galoubet as an accompaniment to a dancing dog and a cock on stilts, a never-wearying picture for Straws, with his migratory, vagabond proclivities.

A bracket on the wall looked as though it might have been intended for a piece of statuary, or a bit of porcelain or china decoration, but had really been set there for his ink-pot, when he was mindful to work in bed, although how the Muse could be induced to set foot in that old nookery of a room could only be explained through the whims and crotchets of that odd young person's character.

Yet come she would and did, although she got dust on her flowing skirts when she swept across the threshold; dust on her snow-white gown--if the writers are to be believed in regard to its hue!--when she sat down in the only chair, and dust in her eyes when she flirted her fan. Fortunate was it for Straws that the Muse is a wayward, freakish gipsy; a straggler in attics; a vagrant of the streets; fortunately for him she is not at all the fine lady she has been depicted! Doubtless she has her own reasons for her vagaries; perhaps because it is so easy to soar from the hovel to fairy-land, but to soar from a palace--that is obviously impossible; it is a height in itself! So this itinerant maiden ever yawns amid scenes of splendor, and, from time immemorial, has sighed for lofts, garrets, and such humble places as Straws' earthly abode.

At the present time, however, Straws was alone. This eccentric but lovely young lady had not deigned to visit him that day. Once, indeed, she had just looked in, but whisked back again into the hall, slamming the door after her, and the pen, momentarily grasped, had fallen from Straws' hand. Instead of reaching for the ink-bottle he reached in the cupboard for the other bottle. Again she came near entering through the window--having many unconventional ways of coming into a room!--but after looking in for a moment, changed her mind after her fashion and floated away into thin space like the giddy, volatile mistress that she was. After that she appeared no more--probably making a friendly call on some one else!--and Straws resigned himself

to her heartless perfidy, having become accustomed to her frivolous, fantastic moods.

Indeed, what else could he have done; what can any man do when his lady-love deserts him, save to make the best of it? But he found his consolation in a pipe; not a pipe of tobacco, nor yet a pipe of old madeira, which, figuratively, most disappointed lovers seek; but a pipe of melody, a pipe of flowing tunes and stirring marches; a pipe of three holes, vulgarly termed by those who know not its high classic origin from the Grecian reeds and its relation to the Pandian pipes, a tin whistle! Thus was Straws classic in his taste, affecting the instrument wherein Acis sighed his soul and breath away for fair Galatea!

It had been a lazy, purposeless day. He had awakened at noon; had coffee and rolls in bed; had dressed, got up, looked out, lain down again, read, and vainly essayed original composition. Now, lying on his back, with the Complete and Classic Preceptor before him, he soothed himself with such music "as washes the every-day dust from the soul." For a pipe of three holes, his instrument had a remarkable compass; melody followed melody--"The Harp that Once through Tara's Hall," "She is Far from the Land," "In Death I shall Calm Recline," and other popular pieces. When Straws missed a note he went back to find it; when he erred in a phrase, he patiently repeated it. The cadence in the last mournful selection, "Bid her not shed a tear of sorrow," was, on his first attempt, fraught with exceeding discord,

and he was preparing once more to assault the citadel of grief, entrenched with bristling high notes, when an abrupt knocking at the door, followed by the appearance of a face marred by wrath and adorned with an enormous pair of whiskers, interrupted his attack.

"Sair," said this person, excitedly, with no more than his head in the room, like a Punch and Judy figure peering from behind a curtain, "you are ze one gran' nuisance! Eet is zat--what you call eet?--whistle! I am crazee--crazee!"

"Yes; you look it!" replied Straws, sympathetically. "Perhaps, if you had a keep--"

"I am not crazee!" vociferated the man.

"No? Perhaps I could tell better, if I could see more of you. Judging from the sample, I confess to curiosity for a full-length view. If you will step in--"

"I will not step in! I will step out! I will leave zis house! I will leave--forever!"

And the head vanished as suddenly as it had appeared, to be followed by hasty footsteps down the stairway.

"Now I can understand why Orpheus was torn to pieces," ruminated

Straws, mournfully surveying the offending pipe. "He played on the lyre! Return to thy cupboard, O reed divine!"--putting the whistle back in the box--"a vile world, as Falstaff says! Heigho!"--yawning--"life is an empty void--which reminds me I have a most poetic appetite. What shall I do"--and Straws sat up relinquishing his lounging attitude--"go out, or have pot-luck in the room? Tortier's bouillabaisse would about tickle the jaded palate. A most poetic dish, that bouillabaisse! Containing all the fish that swim in the sea and all the herbs that grow on the land! Thus speaks gluttony! Get thee behind me, odoriferous temptation of garlic! succulent combination of broth and stew!"

So saying, Straws sprang from his bed, lighted a charcoal fire in his tiny grate; rummaged a bureau drawer and drew forth an end of bacon, a

potato or two, a few apples, an onion and the minor part of a loaf of bread, all of which, except the bread, he sliced and thrust indiscriminately into the frying-pan and placed over the blue flame. Next from behind the mirror he produced a diminutive coffee pot into which he measured, with extreme care, just so much of the ground berry, being rather over-nice about his demitasse. Having progressed thus far in his preparation for pot, or frying-pan luck--and indeed it seemed a matter of luck, or good fortune, how that mixture would turn out--he rapped on the floor with the heel of his boot, like the prince in the fairy tale, summoning his attendant good genii, and in a few moments a light tapping on the door announced the coming of a servitor.

Not a mighty wraith nor spook of Arabian fancy, but a very small girl, or child, with very black hair, very white skin and very dark, beautiful eyes. A daughter of mixed ancestry, yet with her dainty hands and little feet, she seemed descended from sprites or sylphs.

"Monsieur called," she said in her pretty dialect.

"Yes, my dear. Go to Monsieur Tortier's, Celestina, and tell him to give you a bottle of the kind Monsieur Straws always takes."

"At once, Monsieur," she answered, very gravely, very seriously. And Celestina vanished like a butterfly that flutters quickly away.

"Now this won't be bad after all," thought Straws, sniffing at the frying-pan which had begun to sputter bravely over the coals, while the coffee pot gave forth a fragrant steam. "A good bottle of wine will transform a snack into a collation; turn pot-luck into a feast!"

As thus he meditated the first of night's outriders, its fast-coming shadows, stole through the window; following these swift van-couriers, night's chariot came galloping across the heavens; in the sky several little clouds melted like Cleopatra's pearls. Musing before his fire the poet sat, not dreaming thoughts no mortal ever dreamed before, but turning the bacon and apples and stirring in a few herbs, for no other particular reason than that he had them and thought he might as

well use them.

"Celestina is taking longer than usual," he mused. "Perhaps, though, Monsieur Tortier intends to surprise me with an unusually fine bottle. Yes; that is undoubtedly the reason for the delay. He is hunting about in the cellar for something a little out of the ordinary. But here is Celestina now!" as the child reappeared, with footsteps so noiseless the poet saw before he heard her. "Where is the bottle, my little Ariel? It must be an extra fine vintage. Bless old Tortier's noble heart!"

"There isn't any bottle," said the child. "Monsieur said that your account--"

"The miserable old hunks! His heart's no bigger than a pin-head!"

"Please, I'm so sorry!" spoke up Celestina, a suspicious moisture in her eyes.

"I know it, my dear," returned Straws. "Your heart is as big as his whole body. One of your tears is more precious than his most priceless nectar."

"I beg-ged him--that's why I--I stayed so--long!" half-sobbed Celestina.

"There! there!" said Straws, wiping her eyes. "Of course it's very tragic, but there's no use crying over spilled milk. Dear me, dear me; what can we do? It's terrible, but you know the proverb: 'Every cloud has a silver lining.' Perhaps this one has. I wish it had; or a golden one! Think of a cloud of gold, Celestina! Wouldn't we be rich? What would you do with it?"

"I'd go to--Monsieur Tortier's and--and get the bottle," said the child in an agony of distress.

He lifted her on his knee, soothed her and held her in his arms, stroking her dark hair.

"I believe you would," he said. "And now, as we haven't got the golden cloud, let us see how we can get on without it. How shall we conquer that ogre, Monsieur Tortier? What would you suggest, Celestina?"

The child looked into the fire, with eyes wide-open.

"Come, be a good fairy now," urged Straws, "and tell me."

"Why don't you write him a poem?" said Celestina, turning her eyes, bright with excitement, upon him.

"A poem! Non--by Jove, you're right! An inspiration, my dear! People like to be thought what they are not. They want to be praised for

virtues foreign to themselves. The ass wants to masquerade as the lion. 'Tis the law of nature. Now Monsieur Tortier is a Jew; a scrimp; a usurer! Very well, we will celebrate the virtues he hath not in verse and publish the stanza in the Straws' column. After all, we are only following the example of the historians, and they're an eminently respectable lot of people. Celestina! You watch the coffee pot, and I'll grind out the panegyric!"

The child knelt before the fire, but her glance strayed from the steaming spout to the poet's face, as he sat on the edge of his bed and rapidly scribbled. By the time the bacon was fairly done and the other condiments in the frying-pan had turned to a dark hue, the production was finished and triumphantly waved in mid air by the now hopeful Straws.

"I'll just read you a part of it, my dear!" he said. "It's not half bad. But perhaps it would--bore you?" With exaggerated modesty.

"Oh, I just love your poetry!" cried the girl, enthusiastically.

"If everybody were only like you now! Isn't it too bad you've got to grow up and grow wiser? But here's the refrain. There are six stanzas, but I won't trouble you with all of them, my dear. One mustn't drive a willing horse, or a willing auditor."

And in a voice he endeavored to render melodious, with her rapt glance

fixed upon him, Straws read:

"Sing, my Muse, the lay of the prodigal host!
  Who enters here leaveth behind not hope.
Course follows course; entrée, relevé, ragoût,
  Ambrosial sauces, pungent, after luscious soup.
The landlord spurs his guests to fresh attack,
  With fricassee, réchauffé and omelets;
A toothsome feast that Apicius would fain have served,
  While wine, divine, new zeal in all begets.
    Who is this host, my Muse, pray say?
    Who but that prodigal, Tortier!

"There, my dear," concluded Straws, "those feet are pretty wobbly to walk, but flattery moves on lame legs faster than truth will travel on two good ones. Besides, I haven't time to polish them properly, or the mess in the frying-pan will spoil. Better spoil the poem than the contents of the flesh pots! Now if--dear me, Celestina, if you haven't let the coffee pot boil over!"

"Oh, Monsieur," cried the child, almost weeping again. "I forgot to watch it! I just couldn't while you were writing poetry."

"The excuse more than condones the offense," continued the other. "But as I was about to say, you take this poem to Monsieur Tortier, make your prettiest bow and courtesy--let me see you make a courtesy."

The girl bowed as dainty as a little duchess.

"That should melt a heart of stone in itself," commented Straws. "But Tortier's is flint! After that charming bow, you will give him my compliments; Mr. Straws' compliments, remember; and, would he be kind enough just to glance over this poem which Mr. Straws, with much mental effort, has prepared, and which, if it be acceptable to Monsieur Tortier, will appear in Mr. Straws' famous and much-talked-of column in the paper?"

"Oh, Monsieur, I can't remember all that!" said the girl.

"Do it your own way then. Besides, it will be better than mine."

With the poem hugged to her breast, the child fairly flew out of the room, leaving Straws a prey to conflicting emotions. He experienced in those moments of suspense all the doubts and fears of the nestling bard or the tadpole litterateur, awaiting the pleasure and sentence of the august editor or the puissant publisher. Tortier had been suddenly exalted to the judge's lofty pedestal. Would he forthwith be an imperial autocrat; turn tyrant or Thersites; or become critic, one of "those graminivorous animals which gain subsistence by gorging upon buds and leaves of the young shrubs of the forest, robbing them of their verdure and retarding their progress to maturity"?

Straws' anxiety was trouble's labor lost. Celestina appeared, the glad messenger of success, and now, as she came dancing into the room, bore in her arms the fruits of victory which she laid before the poet with sparkling eyes and laughing lips.

"So the poem was accepted?" murmured Straws. "Discerning Tortier! Excellent dilettante! Let him henceforth be known as a man of taste!" Here the poet critically examined the bottle. "Nothing vapid, thin or characterless there!" he added, holding it before the blaze in the grate. "Positively I'll dedicate my forthcoming book to him. 'To that worshipful master and patron, the tasteful Tortier!' What did he say, Celestina, when you tendered him the poem?"

"At first he frowned and then he looked thoughtful. And then he gave me some orange syrup. And then--O, I don't want to say!" A look of unutterable concern displacing the happiness on her features.

"Say on, my dear!" cried Straws.

"He--he said he--he didn't think much of it as--O, I can't tell you; I can't! I can't!"

"Celestina," said the poet sternly, "tell me at once. I command you."

"He said he didn't think much of it as poetry, but that people would read it and come to his café and--O dear, O dear!"

"Beast! Brute! Parvenu! But there, don't cry, my dear. We have much to be thankful for--we have the bottle."

"Oh, yes," she said with conviction, and brightening a bit. "We have the bottle." And as she spoke, "pop" it went, and Celestina laughed. "May I set your table?" she asked.

"After your inestimable service to me, my dear, I find it impossible to refuse," he replied gravely.

"How good you are!" she remarked, placing a rather soiled cloth, which she found somewhere, over a battered trunk.

"I try not to be, but I can't help it!" answered the poet modestly.

"No; that's it; you can't help it!" she returned, moving lightly around the room, emptying the contents of the frying-pan--now an aromatic jumble--on to a cracked blue platter, and setting knife and fork, and a plate, also blue, before him! "And may I wait on you, too?"

"Well, as a special favor--" He paused, appearing to ponder deeply and darkly.

Her eyes were bent upon his face with mute appeal, her suspense so

great she stood stock-still in the middle of the floor, frying-pan in hand.

"Yes; you may wait on me," he said finally, after perplexed and weighty rumination.

At that her little feet fairly twinkled, but her hand was ever so careful as she took the coffee pot from the fire and put it near the blue plate. A glass--how well she knew where everything was!--she found in some mysterious corner and, sitting down on the floor, cross-legged like a little Turk, a mere mite almost lost in the semi-obscurity of the room, she polished it assiduously upon the corner of the table cloth until it shone free from specks of dust; all the time humming very lightly like a bird, or a housewife whose heart is in her work. A strange song, a curious bit of melody that seemed to spring from some dark past and to presage a future, equally sunless.

"Your supper is ready, Monsieur," she said, rising.

"And I am ready for it. Why, how nicely the table looks! Really, when we both grow up, I think we should take a silver ship and sail to some silver shore and live together there forever and evermore. How would you like it?"

Celestina's lips were mute, but her eyes were full of rapturous response, and then became suddenly shy, as though afraid of their own

happiness.

"May I pour your wine?" she asked, with downcast lashes.

"Can you manage it and not spill a drop? Remember Cratinus wept and died of grief seeing his wine--no doubt, this same vintage--spilt!"

But Straws was not called upon to emulate this classic example. The feat of filling his glass was deftly accomplished, and a moment later the poet raised it with, "'Drink to me only with thine eyes!'" An appropriate sentiment for Celestina who had nothing else to drink to him with. "Won't you have some of this--what shall I call it?--hash, stew or ration?"

"Oh, I've had my supper," she answered.

"How fortunate for you, my dear! It isn't exactly a company bill of fare! But everything is what I call snug and cozy. Here we are high up in the world--right under the roof--all by ourselves, with nobody to disturb us--"

A heavy footfall without; rap, rap, rap, on the door; no timid, faltering knock, but a firm application of somebody's knuckles!

"It's that Jack-in-the-box Frenchman," muttered the writer. "Go to the devil!" he called out.

The door opened.

"You have an original way of receiving visitors!" drawled a languid voice, and the glance of the surprised poet fell upon Edward Mauville. "Really, I don't know whether to come in or not," continued the latter at the threshold.

"I beg your pardon," murmured Straws. "I thought it was a--"

"Creditor?" suggested Mauville, with an amused smile. "I know the class. Don't apologize! I am intruding. Quite a family party!" he went on, his gaze resting upon Celestina and the interrupted repast.

With his elegant attire, satin waistcoat and fine ruffles, he seemed out of place in the attic nook of the Muse; a lordling who had wandered by mistake into the wrong room. But he bore himself with the easy assurance of a man who could adapt himself to any surroundings; even to Calliope's shabby boudoir!

"My dear," remarked the disconcerted bard, "get a chair for Mr. Mauville. Or--I beg your pardon--would you mind sitting on the bed? Won't you have some wine? Celestina, bring another glass."

But the girl only stood and stared at the dark, courtly being who thus unexpectedly had burst in upon them.

"There isn't any more," she finally managed to say. "You've got the only glass there is, please!"

"Dear me; dear me!" exclaimed Straws. "How glasses do get broken! I have so few occasions to use them, too, for I don't very often have visitors."

"You are surprised to see me?" continued Mauville, pleasantly, seating himself on the edge of the bed. "Go on with your supper. You don't mind my smoking while you eat?"

"No; the odor of onions is a little strong, isn't it?" laughed the other. "Rather strange, by the by, some of nature's best restoratives should be rank and noisome, while her poisons, like the Upas tree, are often sweet-smelling and agreeable?"

"Yes," commented the land baron; "we make the worst faces over the medicines that do us the most good."

"I presume," said Straws, delighted at the prospect of an argument, and forgetting his curiosity over the other's visit in this brief interchange of words, "nature but calls our attention to the fact that we may know our truest friends are not those with the sweetest manners."

"Heaven forbid!" remarked Mauville. "But how are you getting on with your column? A surfeit of news and gossip, I presume? What a busy fellow you are, to be sure! Nothing escapes through your seine. Big fish or little fish, it is all one. You dress them up with alluring sauce."

The bard shook his head.

"The net has been coming in dry," he said gloomily. "But that's the way with the fish. Sometimes you catch a good haul, and then they all disappear. It's been bad luck lately."

"Perhaps I can make a cast for you," cried the patroon eagerly.

"And bring up what?" asked the hack.

"Something everybody will read; that will set the gossips talking."

"A woman's reputation?"

"No; a man's."

"That is to be regretted," said Straws. "If, now, it were only a woman's--.However, it's the next best thing to start the town a-gossiping. I am much obliged to you for taking the trouble of calling. All those stairs to climb, too!"

"I was sure you would be glad to hear of it," remarked the patroon, slowly, studying with his bright, insolent glance, the pale, intellectual face of the scribbler.

"Yes; there's only one thing stands in the way."

"And that?"

"I never publish anything I don't believe. Don't misunderstand me, please." Pouring out a glass of wine. "Unfortunately I am so incredulous! Isn't it a pity? I am such a carping cynic; a regular skeptic that follows the old adage, 'Believe that story false that ought not to be true.' It's such a detriment to my work, too! A pretty scandal at the top of my column would make me famous, while a sprinkling of libels and lampoons would enable me to move down a story or two. But, after all, I'd feel lost in the luxury of a first floor front chamber. So, you see, nature adjusts herself to our needs."

"Makes the shell to fit the snail, as it were," commented the land baron, patronizingly, gazing around the little cupboard of a room. "At any rate," he added, in an effort to hide his dissatisfaction, "it's a pleasure to become better acquainted with such a--what shall I say?--whimsical fellow as yourself?"

"That's it," returned the bard. "Whimsical!"

"I dare say you have had many a chance to turn an honest penny or two, if you had not been so skeptical, as you call it?" remarked the patroon, significantly. "People, I presume, have even offered to pay you for publishing the compliments of the season about their neighbors?"

"Well," answered the scribbler, laughing, "I may have Midas' longing for gold, but I also have his ears. And the ears predominate. I am such an ass I have even returned a fair petitioner's perfumed note! Such a dainty little hand! How good the paper smelt! How devilish it read! The world's idea about the devil always smelling of sulphur and brimstone is a slander on that much abused person. I can positively affirm that he smells of musk, attar, myrrh; as though he had lain somewhere with a lady's sachet or scent-bag."

"Really you should revise Milton," murmured the land baron, carelessly, his interest quite gone. "But I must be moving on." And he arose. "Good evening."

"Good night!" said Straws, going to the door after his departing guest. "Can you see your way down? Look out for the turn! And don't depend too much on the bannisters--they're rather shaky. Well, he's gone!" Returning once more to the room. "We're coming up in the world, my dear, when such fashionable callers visit us! What do you think of him?"

"He is very--handsome!" replied the child.

"Oh, the vanity of the sex! Is he--is he handsomer than I?"

"Are you--handsome?" she asked.

"Eh? Don't you think so?"

"No-o," she cried, in a passion of distressed truthfulness.

"Thank you, my dear! What a flattering creature you'll become, if you keep on as you've begun! How you'll wheedle the men, to be sure!"

"But mustn't I say what I think?"

"Always! I'm a bad adviser! Think of bringing up a young person, especially a girl, to speak the truth! What a time she'll have!"

"But I couldn't do anything else!" she continued, with absorbing and painful anxiety.

"Don't, then! I'm instructing you to your destruction, but--don't! I'm a philosopher in the School for Making Simpletons. What will you do when you go out into the broad world with truth for your banner and your heart on your sleeve?"

"How could I have my heart on my sleeve?" asked Celestina.

"Because you couldn't help it!"

"Really and truly on my sleeve?"

"Really and truly!" he affirmed, gravely.

"How funny!" answered the girl.

"No; tragic! But what shall we do now, Celestina?"

"Wash the dishes," said the child, practically.

"But, my dear, we won't need them until to-morrow," expostulated the poet. "Precipitancy is a bad fault. Now, if you had proposed a little music, or a fairy tale--"

"Oh, I could wash them while you played, or told me a story," suggested the child, eagerly.

"That isn't such a bad idea," commented Straws, reflectively.

"Then you will let me?" she asked.

"Go ahead!" said the bard, and he reached for the whistle.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SWEETEST THING IN NATURE

The city, bustling and animated by day, like an energetic housewife, was at night a gay demoiselle, awakening to new life and excitement. The clerk betook himself to his bowling or billiards and the mechanic to the circus, while beauty and fashion repaired to the concert room or to the Opéra Français, to listen to Halévy or Donizetti. Restless Americans or Irishmen rubbed elbows with the hurrying Frenchman or Spaniard, and the dignified creole gentleman of leisure alone was wrapped in a plenitude of dignity, computing probably the interest he drew on money loaned these assiduous foreigners.

Soldiers who had been granted leave of absence or had slipped the guard at the camp on Andrew Jackson's battle-ground swaggered through the streets. The change from a diet of pork and beans and army hard tack was so marked that Uncle Sam's young men threw restraint to the winds, took the mask balls by storm and gallantly assailed and made willing prisoners of the fair sex. Eager to exchange their irksome life in camp for the active campaign in Mexico, it was small wonder they relieved their impatience by many a valiant dash into the hospitable town.

Carriages drove by with a rumble and a clatter, revealing a fleeting

glimpse of some beauty with full, dark eye. Venders of flowers importuned the passers-by, doing a brisk business; the oyster and coffee stands reminded the spectator of a thoroughfare in London on a Saturday night, with the people congregating about the street stalls; but the brilliantly illumined places of amusement, with their careless patrons plainly apparent to all from without, resembled rather a boulevard scene in the metropolis of France. "Probably," says a skeptical chronicler, "here and there are quiet drawing-rooms, and tranquil firesides, where domestic love is a chaste, presiding goddess." But the writer merely presumes such might have been the case, and it is evident from his manner of expression, he offers the suggestion, or afterthought, charitably, with some doubts in his mind. Certainly he never personally encountered the chaste goddess of the hearth, or he would have qualified his words and made his statement more positive.

From the life of the streets, the land baron turned into a well-lighted entrance, passing into a large, luxuriously furnished saloon, at one end of which stood a table somewhat resembling a roulette board. Seated on one side was the phlegmatic cashier, and, opposite him, the dealer, equally impassive. Unlike faro--the popular New Orleans game--no deal box was needed, the dealer holding the cards in his hand, while a cavity in the center of the table contained a basket, where the cards, once used, were thrown. A large chandelier cast a brilliant light upon the scene.

"Messieurs, faites vos jeux," drawled the monotonous voice of the dealer, and expectation was keenly written on the faces of the double circle of players--variously disclosed, but, nevertheless, apparent in all; a transformation of the natural expression of the features; an obvious nervousness of manner, or where the countenance was impassive, controlled by a strong will, a peculiar glitter of the eyes, betokening the most insatiable species of the gambler. As the dealer began to shuffle together six packs of cards and place them in a row on the table, he called out:

"Nothing more goes, gentlemen!"

The rapidity with which the cashier counted the winnings at a distance and shoved them here and there with the long rake was amazing and bewildering to the novice risking a few gold pieces for the first time on the altar of chance. Sorting the gold pieces in even bunches, the cashier estimated them in a moment; shoved them together; counted an equal amount of fives with his fingers; made a little twirl in the pile on the table; pushed it toward the winning pieces and left them tumbled up together in pleasing confusion.

"Messieurs, faites vos--"

And the clinking went on, growing louder and louder, the clinking of gold, which has a particularly musical sound, penetrating, crystalline as the golden bells of Exodus, tinkling in the twilight of

the temple on the priest's raiment. The clinking, clinking, that lingers in the brain long after, drawing the players to it night after night; an intoxicating murmur, singing the desires that dominate the world; the jingling that makes all men kin!

"Oh, dear!" said a light feminine voice, as the rapacious rake unceremoniously drew in a poor, diminutive pile of gold. "Why did I play? Isn't it provoking?"

"You have my sympathy, Mistress Susan," breathed a voice near her.

Looking around, she had the grace to blush becomingly, and approached Mauville with an expressive gesture, leaving Adonis and Kate at the table.

"Don't be shocked, Mr. Mauville," she began, hurriedly. "We were told it was among the sights, and, having natural curiosity--"

"I understand. Armed with righteousness, why should not one go anywhere?"

"Why, indeed?" she murmured.

"But I'm afraid I'm taking you from your play?"

"I'm not going to play any more to-night."

"Tired, already?"

"No; but--but I haven't a cent. That miserable table has robbed me of everything. All I have left"--piteously--"are the clothes on my back."

"Something must have been the matter with your 'system.' But if a temporary loan--"

Susan was tempted, gazing longingly at the table, with the fever burning in her.

"No," she said, finally. "I think I would win, but, of course, I might lose."

"A wise reservation! Never place your fortune on the hazard of the die."

"But I have! What's the use of making good resolutions now? It's like closing the barn-door after--"

"Just so!" he agreed. "But it might have been worse."

"How?" In dismay. "Didn't that stony-looking man rake in my last gold piece? He didn't even look sorry, either. But what is the matter with

your arm?" The land baron's expression became ominous. "You shook hands with your left hand. Oh, I see; the duel!" Lightly.

"How did you hear about it?" asked Mauville, irritably.

"Oh, in a roundabout way. Murder will out! And Constance--she was so solicitous about Mr. Saint-Prosper, but rather proud, I believe, because he"--with a laugh--"came off victorious."

Susan's prattle, although accompanied by innocent glances from her blue eyes, was sometimes the most irritating thing in the world, and the land baron, goaded beyond endurance, now threw off his careless manner and swore in an undertone by "every devil in Satan's calendar."

"Can you not reserve your soliloquy until you leave me?" observed Susan, sweetly. "Otherwise--"

"I regret to have shocked your ladyship," he murmured, satirically.

"I forgive you." Raising her guileless eyes. "When I think of the provocation, I do not blame you--so much!"

"That is more than people do in your case," muttered the land baron savagely.

Susan's hand trembled. "What do you mean?" she asked, not without apprehension regarding his answer.

"Oh, that affair with the young officer--the lad who was killed in the duel, you know--"

Her composure forsook her for the moment and she bit her lip cruelly.

"Don't!" she whispered. "I am not to blame. I never dreamed it would go so far! Why should people--"

"Why?" he interposed, ironically.

Susan pulled herself together. "Yes, why?" she repeated, defiantly. "Can women prevent men from making fools of themselves any more than they can prevent them from amusing themselves as they will? To-day it is this toy; to-morrow, another. At length"--bitterly--"a woman comes to consider herself only a toy."

Her companion regarded her curiously. "Well, well!" he ejaculated, finally. "Losing at cards doesn't agree with your temper."

"Nor being worsted by Saint-Prosper with yours!" she retorted quickly.

Mauville looked virulent, but Susan, feeling that she had retaliated

in ample measure, recovered her usual equanimity of temper and placed a conciliatory hand sympathetically on his arm.

"We have both had a good deal to try us, haven't we? But how stupid men are!" she added suddenly. "As if you could not find other consolation!"

He directed toward her an inquiring glance.

"Some time ago, while I was acting in London," resumed Susan, thoughtfully, "the leading lady refused to receive the attentions of a certain odious English lord. She was to make her appearance in a piece upon which her reputation was staked. Mark what happened! She was hissed! Hissed from the stage! My lord led this hostile demonstration and all his hired claqueurs joined in. She was ruined; ruined!" concluded Susan, smiling amiably.

"You are ingenious, Mistress Susan--not to say a trifle diabolical. Your plan--"

She opened her eyes widely. "I have suggested no plan," she interrupted, hurriedly.

"Well, let us sit down and I will tell you about a French officer who--But here is a quiet corner, Mistress Susan, and if you will promise not to repeat it, I will regale you with a bit of interesting

gossip."

"I promise--they always do!" she laughed.

For such a frivolous lady, Susan was an excellent listener. She, who on occasions chattered like a magpie, was now silent as a mouse, drinking in the other's words with parted lips and sparkling eyes. First he showed her the letter François had brought him. Unmarked by postal indications, the missive had evidently been intrusted to a private messenger of the governor whose seal it bore. Dated about three years previously, it was written in a somewhat illegible, but not unintelligible, scrawl, the duke's own handwriting.

"I send you, my dear marquis," began the duke, "a copy of the secret report of the military tribunal appointed to investigate the charges against your kinsman, Lieut. Saint-Prosper, and regret the finding of the court should have been one of guilty of treason.

"Saint-Prosper and Abd-el-Kader met near the tomb of a marabout. From him the French officer received a famous ruby which he thrust beneath his zaboot--the first fee of their compact. That night when the town lay sleeping, a turbaned host, armed with yataghans, stole through the flowering cactuses. Sesame! The gate opened to them; they swarmed within! The soldiers, surprised, could render little resistance; the ruthless invaders cut them down while they were sleeping or before they could sound the alarm. The bravest blood of France flowed

lavishly in the face of the treacherous onslaught; blood of men who had been his fastest friends, among whom he had been so popular for his dauntless courage and devil-may-care temerity! But a period, fearfully brief, and the beloved tri-color was trampled in the dust; the barbarian flag of the Emir floated in its place.

"All these particulars, and the part Saint-Prosper played in the terrible drama, Abd-el-Kader, who is now our prisoner, has himself confessed. The necessity for secrecy, you, my dear Marquis, will appreciate. The publicity of the affair now would work incalculable injury to the nation. It is imperative to preserve the army from the taint of scandal. The nation hangs on a thread. God knows there is iniquity abroad. I, who have labored for the honor of France and planted her flag in distant lands, look for defeat, not through want of bravery, but from internal causes. A matter like this might lead to a popular uprising against the army. Therefore, the king wills it shall be buried by his faithful servants."

As Mauville proceeded Susan remained motionless, her eyes growing larger and larger, until they shone like two lovely sapphires, but when he concluded she gave a little sigh of pleasure and leaned back with a pleased smile.

"Well?" he said, finally, after waiting some moments for her to speak.

"How piquantly wicked he is!" she exclaimed, softly.

"Piquantly, indeed!" repeated the land baron, dryly.

"And he carries it without a twinge! What a petrified conscience!"

"I believe you find him more interesting than ever?" said Mauville, impatiently.

"Possibly!" Languidly. "An exceptional moral ailment sometimes makes a man more attractive--like a--an interesting subject in a hospital, you know! But I have always felt," she continued, with sudden seriousness, "there was something wrong with him. When I first saw him, I was sure he had had no ordinary past, but I did not dream it was quite so--what shall we call it--"

"Unsavory?" suggested her companion.

"That accounts for his unwillingness to talk about Africa," went on Susan. "Soldiers, as a rule, you know, like to tell all about their sanguinary exploits. But the tented field was a forbidden topic with him. And once when I asked him about Algiers he was almost rudely evasive."

"He probably lives in constant fear his secret will become known," said Mauville, thoughtfully. "As a matter of fact, the law provides

that no person is to be indicted for treason unless within three years after the offense. The tribunal did not return an indictment; the three years have just expired. Did he come to America to make sure of these three years?"

But Susan's thoughts had flitted to another feature of the story.

"How strange my marquis should be connected with the case! What an old compliment-monger he was! He vowed he was deeply smitten with me."

"And then went home and took to his bed!" added Mauville, grimly.

"You wretch!" said the young woman, playfully. "So that is the reason the dear old molly-coddle did not take me to any of the gay suppers he promised? Is it not strange Saint-Prosper has not met him?"

"You forget the marquis has been confined to his room since his brief, but disastrous, courtship of you. His infatuation seems to have brought him to the verge of dissolution."

"Was it not worth the price?" she retorted, rising. "But I see my sister and Adonis are going, so I must be off, too. So glad to have met you!"

"You are no longer angry with me?"

"No; you are very nice," she said. "And you have forgiven me?"

"Need you ask?" Pressing her hand. "Good evening, Mistress Susan!"

"Good evening. Oh, by the way, I have an appointment with Constance to rehearse a little scene together this evening. Would you mind loaning me that letter?"

"With pleasure; but remember your promise."

"Promise?" repeated the young woman.

"Not to tell."

"Oh, of course," said Susan.

"But if you shouldn't--"

"Then?"

"Then you might say the marquis, your friend and admirer, gave you the letter. It would, perhaps, be easier for you to account for it than for me."

"But if the marquis should learn--" began the other, half-dubiously.

"He is too ill for anything except the grave."

"Oh, the poor old dear!"

She looked at the gaming table with its indefatigable players and then turned to Kate and Adonis who approached at that moment. "How did you come out, Adonis?"

"Out," he said, curtly.

"Lucky in love, unlucky at"--began Kate.

"Then you must be very unlucky in love," he retorted, "for you were a good winner at cards."

"Oh, there are exceptions to that rule," said Kate lazily, with a yawn. "I'm lucky at both--in New Orleans!"

"I have perceived it," retorted Adonis, bitterly.

"Don't quarrel," Susan implored. Regarding the table once more, she sighed: "I'm so sorry I came!"

But her feet fairly danced as she flew towards the St. Charles. She entered, airy as a saucy craft, with "all sails in full chase, ribbons and gauzes streaming at the top," and, with a frou-frou of skirts,

burst into Constance's room, brimful of news and importance. She remained there for some time, and when she left, it was noteworthy her spirits were still high. In crossing the hall, her red stockings became a fitting color accompaniment to her sprightly step, as she moved over the heavy carpet, skirts raised coquettishly, humming with the gaiety of a young girl who has just left boarding school.

"A blooming, innocent creature!" growled an up-the-river planter, surveying her from one of the landings. "Lord love me, if she were only a quadroon, I'd buy her!"

CHAPTER IX

A DEBUT IN THE CRESCENT CITY

A versatile dramatic poet is grim Destiny, making with equal facility tragedy, farce, burletta, masque or mystery. The world is his inn, and, like the wandering master of interludes, he sets up his stage in the court-yard, beneath the windows of mortals, takes out his figures and evolves charming comedies, stirring melodramas, spirited harlequinades and moving divertissement. But it is in tragedy his constructive ability is especially apparent, and his characters, tripping along unsuspectingly in the sunny byways, are suddenly confronted by the terrifying mask and realize life is not all pleasant pastime and that the Greek philosophy of retribution is nature's law, preserving the unities. When the time comes, the Master of events, adjusting them in prescribed lines, reaches by stern obligation the avoidless conclusion.

Consulting no law but his own will, the Marquis de Ligne had lived as though he were the autocrat of fate itself instead of one of its servants, and therefore was surprised when the venerable playwright prepared the unexpected dénouement. In pursuance of this end, it was decreed by the imperious and incontrovertible dramatist of the human family that this crabbed, vicious, antiquated marionette should wend his way to the St. Charles on a particular evening. Since the day at

the races, the eccentric nobleman had been ill and confined to his room, but now he was beginning to hobble around, and, immediately with returning strength, sought diversion.

"François," he said, "what is there at the theater to-night?"

"Comic opera, my lord?"

The marquis made a grimace. "Comic opera outside of Paris!" he exclaimed, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"A new actress makes her début at the St. Charles."

"Let it be the début, then! Perhaps she will fail, and that will amuse me."

"Yes, my lord."

"And, by the way, François, did you see anything of a large envelope, a buff-colored envelope, I thought I left in my secretary?"

"No, my lord." But François became just a shade paler.

"It is strange," said the marquis, half to himself, "what could have become of it! I destroyed other papers, but not that. You are sure, François, you did not steal it?"

By this time the servant's knees began to tremble, and, had the marquis' eyesight been better, he could not have failed to detect the other's agitation. But the valet assumed a bold front, as he asked:

"Why should I have stolen it?"

"True, why?" grumbled the marquis. "It would be of no service to you. No; you didn't take it. I believe you honest--in this case!"

"Thank you, my lord!"

"After all, what does it matter?" muttered the nobleman to himself. "What's in a good name to-day--with traitors within and traitors without? 'Tis love's labor lost to have protected it! We've fostered a military nest of traitors. The scorpions will be faithful to nothing but their own ends. They'll fight for any master."

Recalled to his purpose of attending the play by François' bringing from the wardrobe sundry articles of attire, the marquis underwent an elaborate toilet, recovering his good humor as this complicated operation proceeded. Indeed, by the time it had reached a triumphant end and the valet set the marquis before a mirror, the latter had forgotten his dissatisfaction at the government in his pleasure with himself.

"Too much excitement is dangerous, is it?" he mumbled. "I am afraid there will be none at all. A stage-struck young woman; a doll-like face, probably; a milk-and-water performance! Now, in the old days actors were artists. Yes, artists!" he repeated, as though he had struck a chord that vibrated in his memory.

Arriving at the theater, he was surprised at the scene of animation; the line of carriages; the crowd about the doors and in the entrance hall! Evidently the city eagerly sought novelty, and Barnes' company, offering new diversion after many weeks of opera, drew a fair proportion of pleasure-seekers to the portals of the drama. The noise of rattling wheels and the banging of carriage doors; the aspect of many fair ladies, irreproachably gowned; the confusion of voices from venders hovering near the gallery entrance--imparted a cosmopolitan atmosphere to the surroundings.

"You'd think some well-known player was going to appear, François!" grumbled the marquis, as he thrust his head out of his carriage. "Looks like a theater off the Strand! And there's an orange-girl! A dusky Peggy!"

The vehicle of the nobleman drew up before the brilliantly-lighted entrance. Mincingly, the marquis dismounted, assisted by the valet; within he was met by a loge director who, with the airs of a Chesterfield, bowed the people in and out.

"Your ticket, sir!" said this courteous individual, scraping unusually low.

The marquis waved his hand toward his man, and François produced the bits of pasteboard. Escorted to his box, the nobleman settled himself in an easy chair, after which he stared impudently and inquisitively around him.

And what a heterogeneous assemblage it was; of how many nationalities made up; gay bachelors, representatives of the western trade and eastern manufacturers; a fair sprinkling of the military element, seeking amusement before departing for the front, their brass buttons and striking new uniforms a grim reminder of the conflict waging between the United States and Mexico; cotton brokers, banking agents, sugar, tobacco and flour dealers; some evidently English with their rosy complexions, and others French by their gesticulations! And among the women, dashing belles from Saratoga, proud beauties from Louisville, "milliner-martyred" daughters of interior planters, and handsome creole matrons, in black gowns that set off their white shoulders!

In this stately assemblage--to particularize for a moment!--was seated the (erstwhile!) saintly Madame Etalage, still proud in her bearing, although white as an angel, and by her side, her carpet knight, an extravagant, preposterous fop. A few seats in front of her prattled the lovely ingenue, little Fantoccini, a biting libeller of other

actresses, with her pitiless tongue. To her left was a shaggy-looking gentleman, the Addison of New Orleans' letters, a most tolerant critic, who never spoke to a woman if he could avoid doing so, but who, from his philosophical stool, viewed the sex with a conviction it could do no wrong; a judgment in perspective, as it were!

The marquis paid little attention to the men; it was the feminine portion of the audience that interested him, and he regarded it with a gloating leer, the expression of a senile satyr. Albeit a little on the seamy side of life, his rank and wealth were such that he himself attracted a good deal of attention, matronly eyes being turned in his direction with not unkindly purport. The marquis perceived the stir his presence occasioned and was not at all displeased; on the contrary, his manner denoted gratification, smiling and smirking from bud to blossom and from blossom to bud!

How fascinating it was to revel in the sight of so much youth and beauty from the brink of the grave whereon he stood; how young it made him feel again! He rubbed his withered hands together in childish delight, while he contemplated the lively charms of Fantoccini or devoted himself to the no less diverting scrutiny of certain other dark-haired ladies.

While occupied in this agreeable pastime the nobleman became dimly conscious the debutante had appeared and was greeted with the moderate applause of an audience that is reserving its opinion. "Gad," said one

of the dandies who was keenly observing the nobleman, "it's fashionable to look at the people and not at the actors!" And he straightway stared at the boxes, assuming a lackadaisical, languishing air. Having taken note of his surroundings to his satisfaction, the marquis at length condescended to turn his eye-glass deliberately and quizzically to the stage. His sight was not the best, and he gazed for some time before discerning a graceful figure and a pure, oval face, with dark hair and eyes.

"Humph, not a bad stage presence!" he thought. "Probably plenty of beauty, with a paucity of talent! That's the way nowadays. The voice--why, where have I heard it before? A beautiful voice! What melody, what power, what richness! And the face--" Here he wiped the moisture from his glasses--"if the face is equal to the voice, she has an unusual combination in an artist."

Again he elevated the glass. Suddenly his attenuated frame straightened, his hand shook violently and, the glasses fell from his nerveless fingers.

"Impossible!" he murmured. But the melody of those tones continued to fall upon his ears like a voice from the past.

When the curtain went down on the first act there was a storm of applause. In New Orleans nothing was done by halves, and Constance, as Adrienne Lecouvreur, radiant in youth and the knowledge of

success, was called out several times. The creoles made a vigorous demonstration; the Americans were as pleased in their less impulsive way; and in the loges all the lattices were pushed up, "a compliment to any player," said Straws. To the marquis, the ladies in the loges were only reminiscent of the fashionable dames, with bare shoulders and glittering jewels, in the side boxes of old Drury Lane, leaning from their high tribunals to applaud the Adrienne of twenty years ago!

He did not sit in a theater in New Orleans now, but in London town, with a woman by his side who bent beneath the storm of words she knew were directed at her. As in a dream he lingered, plunged in thought, with no longer the cynical, carping expression on his face as he looked at the stage, but awed and wonder-stricken, transported to another scene through the lapse of years that folded their shadowy wings and made the past to-day. Two vivid pictures floated before him as though they belonged to the present: Adrienne, bright, smiling and happy, as she rushed into the green room, with the plaudits of the multitude heard outside; Adrienne, in her last moments, betrayed to death!

They were applauding now, or was it but the mocking echo of the past? The curtain had descended, but went up again, and the actress stood with flowers showered around her. Save that she was in the springtime of life, while the other had entered summer's season; that her art was tender and romantic, rather than overwhelming and tragic, she was the

counterpart of the actress he had deserted in London; a faithful prototype, bearing the mother's eyes, brow and features; a moving, living picture of the dead, as though the grave had rolled back its stone and she had stepped forth, young once more, trusting and innocent.

The musical bell rang in the wine room, where the worshipers of Bacchus were assembled, the signal that the drop would rise again in five minutes. At the bar the imbibers were passing judgment.

"What elegance, deah boy! But cold--give me Fantoccini!" cried the carpet knight.

"Fantoccini's a doll to her!" retorted the worldly young spark addressed.

"A wicked French doll, then! What do you think?" Turning to the local Addison.

"Sir, she 'snatches a grace beyond the reach of art'!" replied that worthy.

"You ask for a criticism, and he answers in poetry!" retorted the first speaker.

"'Tis only the expression of the audience!" interposed another voice.

"Oh, of course, Mr. Mauville, if you, too, take her part, that is the end of it!"

The land baron's smile revealed withering contempt, as with eyes bright with suppressed excitement, and his face unusually sallow, he joined the group.

"The end of it!" he repeated, fixing his glance upon the captious dandy. "The beginning, you mean! The beginning of her triumphs!"

"Oh, have your own way!" answered the disconcerted critic.

Mauville deliberately turned his back. "And such dunces sit in judgment!" he muttered to the scholar.

"Curse me, Mauville's in a temper to-night!" said the spark in a low voice. "Been drinking, I reckon! But it's time for the next act!"

Punches and juleps were hastily disposed of, and the imbibers quickly sought their places. This sudden influx, with its accompanying laughter and chattering, aroused the marquis from his lethargy. He started and looked around him in bewilderment. The noise and the light conversation, however, soon recalled his mind to a sense of his surroundings, and he endeavored to recover his self-possession.

Could it be possible it was but a likeness his imagination had converted into such vivid resemblance? A sudden thought seized him and he looked around toward the door of the box.

"François!" he called, and the valet, who had been waiting his master's pleasure without, immediately appeared.

"Sit down, François!" commanded the marquis. "I am not feeling well. I may conclude to leave soon, and may need your arm."

The servant obeyed, and the nobleman, under pretense of finding more air near the door, drew back his chair, where he could furtively watch his man's face. The orchestra ceased; the curtain rose, and the valet gazed mechanically at the stage. In his way, François was as blasé as his master, only, of course, he understood his position too well to reveal that lassitude and ennui, the expression of which was the particular privilege of his betters. He had seen many great actresses and heard many peerless singers; he had delved after his fashion into sundry problems, and had earned as great a right as any of the nobility to satiety and defatigation in his old age, but unfortunately he was born in a class which may feel but not reveal, and mask alike content and discontent.

Again those tones floated out from the past; musical, soft! The marquis trembled. Did not the man notice? No; he was still looking gravely before him. Dolt; did he not remember? Could he not recall the

times beyond number when he had heard that voice; in the ivy-covered cottage; in the garden of English roses?

Suddenly the valet uttered an exclamation; the stolid aspect of his face gave way to an obvious thrill of interest.

"My lord!" he cried.

"An excellent actress, François; an excellent actress!" said the marquis, rising. "Is that my coat? Get it for me. What are you standing there for? Your arm! Don't you see I am waiting?"

Overwrought and excitable, he did not dare remain for the latter portion of the drama; better leave before the last act, he told himself, and, dazed by the reappearance of that vision, the old man fairly staggered from the box.

The curtain fell for the last time, and Barnes, with exultation, stood watching in the wings. She had triumphed, his little girl; she had won the great, generous heart of New Orleans. He clapped his hands furiously, joining in the evidences of approval, and, when the ovation finally ceased and she approached, the old manager was so overcome he had not a word to say. She looked at him questioningly, and he who had always been her instructor folded her fondly to his breast.

"I owe it all to you," she whispered.

"Pooh!" he answered. "You stole fire from heaven. I am but a theatrical, bombastic, barnstorming Thespian."

"Would you spoil me?" she interrupted, tenderly.

"You are your mother over again, my dear! If she were only here now! But where is Saint-Prosper? He has not yet congratulated you? He, our good genius, whose generosity has made all this possible!" And Barnes half-turned, when she placed a detaining hand on his arm.

"No, no!"

"Why, my dear, have you and he--"

"Is it not enough that you are pleased?" replied Constance, hastily, with a glance so shining he forgot all further remonstrances.

"Pleased!" exclaimed Barnes. "Why, I feel as gay as Momus! But we'll sing Te Deum later at the festive board. Go now and get ready!"

CHAPTER X

LAUGHTER AND TEARS

A supper was given the company after the performance by the manager, to which representatives of the press--artful Barnes!--had been invited. Of all the merry evenings in the bohemian world, that was one of the merriest. Next to the young girl sat the Count de Propriac, his breast covered with a double row of medals. Of the toasts drunk to Constance, the manager, poets Straws and Phazma, etc., unfortunately no record remains. Of the recollections of the wiry old lady; the impromptu verse of the rhymsters; the roaring speech of Mr. Barnes; the song and dainty flower dance by Susan and Kate--only the bare facts have descended to the chronicler.

So fancy must picture the wreaths of smoke; the superabundance of flowers, the fragrance of cigars mingling with the perfume of fading floral beauties; the pale dark-eyed girl presiding, upon her dusky hair a crown of laurel, set there, despite her protestations, by Phazma and Straws; the devotion of the count to his fair neighbor; the almost superhuman pride of noisy Barnes; the attention bestowed by Susan upon Saint-Prosper, while through his mind wandered the words of a French song:

"Adieu, la cour, adieu les dames;

Adieu les filles et les femmes--"

Intermixed with this sad refrain the soldier's thoughts reverted to the performance, and amidst the chatter of Susan, he reviewed again and again the details of that evening. Was this the young girl who played in school-houses, inns or town halls, he had asked himself, seated in the rear of the theater? How coldly critical had been her auditors; some of the faces about him ironical; the bored, tired faces of men who had well-nigh drained life's novelties; the artificially vivacious faces of women who played at light-heartedness and gaiety! Yet how free from concern had she been, as natural and composed as though her future had not depended upon that night! When she won an ovation, he had himself forgotten to applaud, but had sat there, looking from her to the auditors, to whom she was now bound by ties of admiration and friendliness.

"Don't you like her?" a voice next to him had asked.

Like her? He had looked at the man, blankly.

"Yes," he had replied.

Then the past had seemed to roll between them: the burning sands; the voices of the troops; the bugle call! In his brain wild thoughts had surged and flowed--as they were surging and flowing now.

"Is he not handsome, Constance's new admirer?" whispered Susan. "What can he be saying? She looks so pleased! He is very rich, isn't he?"

"I don't know," answered Saint-Prosper, brusquely.

Again the thoughts surged and surged, and the past intruded itself! Reaching for his glass, he drank quickly.

"Don't you ever feel the effects of wine?" asked the young woman.

His glance chilled her, it seemed so strange and steely!

"I believe you are so--so strong you don't even notice it," added Susan, with conviction. "But you don't have half as good a time!"

"Perhaps I enjoy myself in my way," he answered.

"What is your way?" she asked quickly. "You don't appear to be wildly hilarious in your pleasures." And Susan's bright eyes rested on him curiously. "But we were speaking about the count and Constance. Don't you think it would be a good match?" she continued with enthusiasm. "Alas, my titled admirer got no further than the beginning. But men are deceivers ever! When they do reach the Songs of Solomon, they pass on to Exodus!"

"And leave the fair ones to Lamentations," said Straws, who had caught

her last remarks.

"Or Revelations!" added Phazma.

At the sound of their laughter, Constance looked coldly their way, until a remark from the count at her right, and, "As I was saying, my dear," from the old lady at her left, engrossed the young girl's attention once more. But finally the great enemy of joy--the grim guardian of human pleasure--the reaper whose iron hands move ever in a circle, symbolical of eternity--finally, Time reminded Barnes that the hour had surely arrived when the curtain should descend upon these festivities. So he roared out a last blithe farewell, and the guests departed one by one, taking with them flowers in memory of the occasion, until all had left save Constance, the count, Saint-Prosper and the manager. Barnes was talking somewhat incoherently, holding the soldier by the coat and plunging into successive anecdotes about stage folk, while Saint-Prosper, apparently listening, observed the diplomat and Constance, whose conversation he could overhear.

"As I said to the Royal Infanta of Spain, flattery flies before truth in your presence, Mademoiselle," sighed the count. And then raising her hand to his lips, "Ah, ma chere Mademoiselle, que je vous adore!" he whispered.

She withdrew it hastily, and, ogling and gesticulating, he bowed himself out, followed by the manager.

Leaning against the chair, her figure outlined by the glow from the crystal chandelier, her face in shadow, the hand the diplomat had pressed to his lips resting in the exposed light on the mahogany, the gaiety went out of her face, and the young girl wearily brushed the hair from her brow. As if unaware of the soldier's presence, she glanced absently at the table in its wrecked glory, and, throwing her lace wrap over her arm, was moving toward the door, when he spoke.

"Miss Carew!"

She paused, standing with clasped hands before him, while the scarf slipped from her arm and fell at her feet.

"May I not also tell you how glad I am--that you succeeded to-night?"

"I dislike congratulations!" she said, indifferently.

He looked at her quickly, but her eyes expressed only apathy. In his a sudden gleam of light appeared.

"From me, you mean?" The light became brighter.

She did not answer. His self-control was fast ebbing.

"You underestimate your favors, if you fancy they are easily

forgotten!"

A crimson flush extended to her brow; the unconcern died out of her eyes.

"I do not understand," she answered, slowly.

"When a woman says 'I do not understand,' she means 'I wish to forget'."

Her wide-open glance flashed ominously to his; she clasped and unclasped her fingers.

"Forget what?" she said, coldly.

"Nameless nothings!" he returned. "A smile--a glance--nothing to you, perhaps, but"--the set expression of his face giving way to abrupt passion!--"everything to me! Perhaps I had not meant to say this, but it seems as though the words must come out to-night. It may be"--his voice vibrating with strange earnestness--"for once I want to be myself. For weeks we have been--friends--and then suddenly you begin to treat me--how? As though I no longer existed! Why did you deceive me--let me drift on? Because I was mute, did you think I was blind? Why did I join the strollers--the land baron accused me of following you across the country. He was right; I was following you. I would not confess it to myself before. But I confess it now! It was a fool's

paradise," he ended, bitterly.

She shrank back before his vehement words; something within her appeared violated; as though his plea had penetrated the sanctity of her reserve.

"Would it not be well to say nothing about deception?" she replied, and her dark eyes swept his face. Then, turning from him abruptly, she stepped to the window, and, drawing aside the lace curtains mechanically, looked out.

The city below was yet teeming with life, lights gleaming everywhere and shadowy figures passing. Suddenly out of the darkness came a company of soldiers who had just landed, marching through the streets toward the camping ground and singing as they went.

The chorus, like a mighty breath of patriotism, filled her heart to overflowing. It seemed as though she had heard it for the first time; had never before felt its potency. All the tragedy of war swept before her; all that inspiring, strange affection for country, kith and kin, suddenly exalted her.

Above the tramping of feet, the melody rose and fell on the distant air, dying away as the figures vanished in the gloom. With its love of native land, its expression of the unity of comradeship and ties stronger than death, the song appeared to challenge an answer; and,

when the music ceased, and only the drum-beats still seemed to make themselves heard, she raised her head without moving from her position and looked at him to see if he understood. But though she glanced at him, she hardly saw him. In her mind was another picture--the betrayed garrison; the soldiers slain!--and the horror of it threw such a film over her gaze that he became as a figure in some distressing dream.

An inkling of her meaning--the mute questioning of her eyes--the dread evoked by that revolting vision of the past--were reflected in his glance.

"Deceived you?" he began, and his voice, to her, sounded as from afar. "How--what--"

"Must it be--could it be put into words?"

The deepest shadows dwelt in her eyes; shadows he could not penetrate, although he still doggedly, yet apprehensively, regarded her! Watching her, his brow grew darker.

"Why not?" he continued, stubbornly.

Why? The dimness that had obscured her vision lifted. Now she saw him very plainly, indeed; tall and powerful; his face, harsh, intense, as though by the vigor of physical and mental force he would override any charge or imputation.

Why? She drew herself up, as he quickly searched her eyes, bright with the passions that stirred her breast.

"You told me part of your story that day in the property wagon," she began, repugnance, scorn and anger all mingling in her tones. "Why did you not tell me the rest?"

His glance, too, flashed. Would he still profess not to understand her? His lips parted; he spoke with an effort.

"The rest?" he said, his brow lowering.

"Yes," she answered quickly; "the stain upon your name!--the garrison sold!--the soldiers killed!--murdered!--"

She had turned to him swiftly, fiercely, with her last words, but before the look of sudden shame and dread on his face, her eyes abruptly fell as though a portion of his dishonor had inexplicably touched her. He made no attempt to defend himself--motionless he stood an instant--then, without a word, he moved away. At the threshold he paused, but she did not look up--could not! A moment; an eternity!

"Why don't you go?" she cried. "Why don't you go?"

The door opened, closed; she was alone.

Pale as the dying lilies on the table, she stepped toward the threshold, when Barnes, chipper and still indefatigable, entered by another door. He was too inspired with festal intoxication to observe her agitation.

"What, my dear!" he exclaimed cheerily. "Has he gone? Did you make up your little differences? Did you settle your quarrel before he leaves for Mexico?"

"For Mexico!" she repeated, mechanically.

"Of course. He has his commission in the army and leaves early in the morning. But you look tired, my dear. I declare you are quite pale"--pinching her cheek--"rest will bring back the roses, though."

Impulsively she threw her arms around his neck.

"Why, why, what's this?" he said, patting her head.

"I only care for you," she whispered. "My dear! My dear!"

CHAPTER XI

THE PASSING OF A FINE GENTLEMAN

"'Perhaps she will fail, and that will amuse me,'" ruminated François on his high seat next to the coachman, repeating the marquis' words, as they drove home after the nobleman's precipitous retreat from the theater. "Well, he didn't look as though he had been particularly amused. But no wonder he was startled! It even"--reviewing the impression first made upon him at sight of the actress--"sent a shiver through me!" Here the carriage drew up sharply before the marquis' home, and François, hastily alighting, threw open the door.

"Eh? What? Are we here?" muttered the marquis, starting from the corner where he had been reclining.

He arose with some difficulty; traversed the sidewalk and the shell-strewn path to the house which loomed darkly before them; paused at the foot of the stairs where he breathed heavily, complaining of the oppressiveness of the air; and finally, with the assistance of the valet, found himself once more in his room, the sick chamber he had grown to detest! Here alone--having dismissed the servant as soon as possible--he moved restlessly to and fro, pondering deeply. Since the moment when he had seen and recognized his daughter, all the buoyancy which had given his wasted figure a sort of galvanic vitality seemed

to vanish. It was like the exhaustion of a battery, the collapse of the sustaining power.

"That resemblance can not be coincidence!" he thought. "Oh, errors of the past, you come home in our old age when the limbs are faltering and life is failing!"

Going to the secrétaire, he took out a box that had not been opened in years, and, with trembling fingers, turned over many papers. He shivered, and, thinking it was cold, stirred the fire. Returning to the secretary, he took from the box a package tied with a ribbon still, after the lapse of these many years, slightly fragrant, and he breathed that perfume, so faint, so subtle, while recollections smote him like a knife.

Its scent was familiar to him; it seemed to bring life to the dead, and for the moment in his mind's eye he saw her glowing figure, the love of his youth, with flashing, revengeful eyes and noble mien. He cowered over the desk, as if shrinking from an avenging spirit, while the perfume, like opium, filled his brain with strange fantasies. He strove to drown remembrance, but some force--it seemed not his own!--drove him irresistibly to untie that ribbon, to scrutinize many old theater programs and to gaze upon a miniature in ivory depicting a woman in the loveliness of her charms, but whose striking likeness to the young actress he had just seen filled his heart with strange fear. Some power--surely it could not have been his will which rebelled

strenuously!--impelled him to open those letters and to read them word for word. The tenderness of the epistles fell on his heart as though to scorch it, and he quivered like a guilty wretch. His eyes were fascinated by these words in her last letter: "Should you desert me and your unborn child, your end will be miserable. As I believe in retribution, I am sure you will reap as you have sown."

Suddenly the reader in a frenzy threw the letter to the floor and trampled on it. He regarded the face in the miniature with fear and hatred, and dashing it into the drawer, called down maledictions on her. He ceased abruptly, weak and wavering.

"I am going insane," he said, laughing harshly. "Fool! To let that woman's memory disturb me. So much for her dire prophecy!" And he snapped his fingers and dropped the letter in the fire.

"What can her curse avail?" he said aloud. "She is gone, turned to ashes like that paper and there is no life after this one. All then is nothing--emptiness--a blank! I need rest. It is this cursed dyspepsia which has made me nervous. Something to compose me, and then to bed!"

In spite of soothing powders, however, he passed a restless night and arose unrefreshed, but ordered his valet to bring one of his lightest suits, and, having dressed, he set a white flower upon his coat, while the servant proceeded to apply various pigments to the wrinkled face, until it took on a mocking semblance to the countenance of a man

fifteen years younger. The marquis leered at himself in the pier-glass and assumed a jauntiness of demeanor he was far from feeling.

"I do not look tired or worried, François?"

"Not at all, my lord," replied the obsequious valet. "I never saw you, my lord, appear so young and well."

"Beneath the surface, François, there is age and weakness," answered the marquis in a melancholy tone.

"It is but a passing indisposition, my lord," asserted the servant, soothingly.

"Perhaps. But, François"--peering around--"as I look over my shoulder, do you know what I see?"

The almost hideous expression of the roué's face alarmed the servant.

"No, my lord, what is it?"

"A figure stands there in black and is touching me. It is the spirit of death, François. You can not see it, but there it is--"

"My lord, you speak wildly."

"I have seen some strange things, François. The dead have arisen. And I have received my warning. Soon I shall join those dark specters which once gaily traversed this bright world. A little brandy and soda, François."

The servant brought it to him. The marquis leered awfully over his shoulder once more. "Your health, my guest!" he exclaimed, laughing harshly. "But my hat, François; I have business to perform, important business!"

He ambled out of the room. On the street he was all politeness, removing his hat to a dark brunette who rolled by in her carriage, and pausing to chat with another representative of the sex of the blond type. Then he gaily sauntered on, until reaching the theater he stopped and made a number of inquiries. Who was the manager of Constance Carew? Where was he to be found? "At the St. Charles hotel?" He was obliged to Monsieur, the ticket-seller, and wished him good-day.

Entering the hotel, he sent his card to Barnes, requesting an interview, and the manager, overcome by the honor of such a visit, responded with alacrity. The customary formalities over, the nobleman congratulated Barnes on the performance and led the conversation to the young actress.

"Pardon my curiosity," he said, with apparent carelessness, "but I'm

sure I remember an actress of the same name in London--many years ago?"

"Her mother, undoubtedly," replied the manager, proudly.

"She was married, was she not, to--"

"A scoundrel who took her for his wife in one church and repudiated the ties through another denomination!"

"Ah, a French-English marriage!" said the marquis, blandly. "An old device! But what was this lover's name?"

"This husband's, my lord!"

"Lover or husband, I fancy it is all the same to her now," sneered the caller. "She has passed the point where reputation matters."

"Her reputation is my concern, Monsieur le Marquis!"

"You knew her?" asked the nobleman, as though the conversation wearied him. "And she was faithful to his memory? No scandals--none of those little affairs women of her class are prone to? There"--as Barnes started up indignantly--"spare me your reproaches! I'm too feeble to quarrel. Besides, what is it to me? I was only curious about her--that is all! But she never spoke the name of her husband?"

"Not even to her own child!"

"She does not know her father's name?" repeated the marquis. "But I thank you; Mademoiselle Constance is so charming I must needs call to ask if she were related to the London actress! Good-day, Monsieur! You are severe on the lover. Was it not the fashion of the day for the actresses to take lovers, or for the fops to have an opera girl or a comedienne? Did your most popular performers disdain such diversions?" he sneered. "Pardie, the world has suddenly become moral! A gentleman can no longer, it would seem, indulge in gentlemanly follies."

Mumbling about the decadence of fashion, the marquis departed, his manner so strange the manager gazed after him in surprise.

With no thought of direction, his lips moving, talking to himself in adynamic fashion, the nobleman walked mechanically on until he reached the great cathedral. The organ was rolling and voices arose sweet as those of seraphim. He hesitated at the portal and then laughed to himself. "Well has Voltaire said: 'Pleasure has its time; so, too, has wisdom. Make love in thy youth, and in old age, attend to thy salvation.'" He repeated the latter words, but, although he paused at the threshold and listened, he did not enter.

As he stood there, uncertain and trembling, a figure replete with

youth and vigor approached, and, glancing at her, an exclamation escaped him that caused her to pause and turn.

"You are not well," she said, solicitously. "Can I help you?"

"It is nothing, nothing!" answered the marquis, ashy pale at the sight of her and the proximity of that face which regarded him with womanly sympathy. "Go away."

"At least, let me assist you. You were going to the cathedral? Come!"

His hand rested upon her strong young arm; he felt himself too weak to resist, so, together--father and daughter!--they entered the cathedral. Side by side they knelt--he to keep up the farce, fearing to undeceive her--while yet only mocking words came to the old man's heart, as the bitterness of the situation overwhelmed him. She was a daughter in whom a prince might have found pride, but he remained there mute, not daring to speak, experiencing all the tortures of remorse and retribution. Of what avail had been ambition? How had it overleaped content and ease of mind! Into what a nest of stings and thorns his loveless marriage had plunged him! And now but the black shadow remained; he walked in the darkness of unending isolation. So he should continue to walk straight to the door of death.

He scarcely heard the organ or the voice of the priest. The high altar, with its many symbols, suggested the thousands that had

worshiped there and gone away comforted. Here was abundant testimony of the blessings of divine mercy in the numerous costly gifts and in the discarded crutches, and here faith had manifested itself for generations.

The marquis' throat was hoarse; he could have spoken no words if he had tried. He laughed in his heart at the gifts of the grateful ones; those crosses of ivory and handsome lamps were but symbols of barbarism and superstition. The tablets, with their inscriptions, "Merci" and "Ex voto," were to him absurd, and he gibed at the simple credulity of the people who could thus be misled. All these evidences of thanksgiving were but cumulative testimony that men and women are like little children, who will be pleased over fairy tales or frightened over ghost stories. The promise of paradise, but the fairy tale told by priests to men and women; the threats of punishment, the ghost stories to awe them! A malicious delight crept into his diseased imagination that he alone in the cathedral possessed the extreme divination, enabling him to perceive the emptiness of all these signs and symbols. He labored in a fever of mental excitement and was only recalled to himself as his glance once more rested upon the young girl.

He became dimly conscious that people were moving past them, and he suddenly longed to cry out, "My child!" but he fought down the impulse. There could be no turning back now at the eleventh hour; the marquis was a philosopher, and did not believe that, in a twinkling of

an eye, a man may set behind all that has transpired and regard it as naught. Something within held him from speaking to her--perhaps his own inherent sense of the consistency of things; his appreciation of the legitimate finale to a miserable order of circumstances! Even pride forbade departure from long-established habit. But while this train of thought passed through his mind, he realized she was regarding him with clear, compassionate eyes, and he heard her voice:

"Shall we go now? The services are over."

He obeyed without question.

"Over!"

Those moments by her side would never return! They were about to part to meet no more on earth. He leaned heavily upon her arm and his steps were faltering. Out into the warm sunshine they passed, the light revealing more plainly the ravages of time in his face.

"You must take a carriage," she said to the old man.

"Thank you, thank you," he replied. "Leave me here on the bench. I shall soon be myself. I am only a little weak. You are good to an old man. May I not"--asking solely for the pleasure of hearing her speak--"may I not know the name of one who is kind to an old man?"

"My name is Constance Carew."

He shook as with the palsy. "A good name, a good name!" he repeated. "I remember years ago another of that name--an actress in London. A very beautiful woman, and good! But even she had her detractors and none more bitter than the man who wronged her. You--you resemble her! But there, don't let me detain you. I shall do very well here. You are busy, I dare say."

"Yes, I should be at rehearsal," she replied regretfully.

"At rehearsal!" he repeated. "Yes!--yes!--. But the stage is no place for you!" he added, suddenly. "You should leave it--leave it!"

She looked at him wonderingly. "Is there nothing more I can do for you?"

"Nothing! Nothing! Except--no, nothing!"

"You were about to ask something?" she observed with more sympathy.

"If you would not think me presuming--if you would not deem it an offense--you remind me of one I loved and lost--it is so long ago since I felt her kiss for the last time--I am so near the grave--"

With tears in her eyes, she bent her head and her fresh young lips

just touched his withered brow.

"Good-by," she said. "I am so sorry for you!" And she was gone, leaving him sitting there motionless as though life had departed.

A rattling cab that clattered noisily past the cabildo and calaboza, and swung around the square, aroused the marquis. He arose, stopped the driver, and entered the rickety vehicle.

"The law office of Marks and Culver," said the marquis.

The man lashed his horse and the attenuated quadruped flew like a winged Pegasus, soon drawing up before the attorneys' office. Fortunately Culver was in, and, although averse to business on any day--thinking more of his court-yard and his fountain than of his law books--this botanist-solicitor made shift to comply with the marquis' instructions and reluctantly earned a modest fee. He even refused to express surprise at my lord's story; one wife in London, another in Paris; why, many a southern gentleman had two families--quadroons being plentiful, why not? Culver unobtrusively yawned, and, with fine courtesy, bowed the marquis out.

Slowly the latter retraced his steps to his home; his feet were heavy as lead; his smile was forced; he glanced frequently over his shoulder, possessed by a strange fantasy.

"I think I will lie down a little," he said to his valet. "In this easy chair; that will do. I am feeling well; only tired. How that mass is repeated in my mind! That is because it is Palestrina, François; not because it is a vehicle to salvation, employed by the gibbering priests. Never let your heart rule your head, boy. Don't mistake anything for reality. 'What have you seen in your travels?' was asked of Sage Evemere. 'Follies!' was the reply. 'Follies, follies everywhere!' We never live; we are always in the expectation of living."

He made an effort to smile which was little more than a grimace.

"A cigar, François!"

"My lord, are you well?--"

The marquis flew into a rage and the valet placed an imported weed in his master's hand.

"A light, François!"

The valet obeyed. For a moment the strong cigar seemed to soothe the old man, although his hand shook like an aspen as he held it.

"Now, bring me my Voltaire," commanded the marquis. "The volume on the table, idiot! Ah! here is what I wish: 'It takes twenty years to bring

man from the state of embryo, and from that of a mere criminal, as he is in his first infancy, to the point when his reason begins to dawn. It has taken thirty centuries to know his structure; it would take eternity to know something of the soul; it takes but an instant to kill him.' But an instant; but an instant!" he repeated.

He puffed feebly at the cigar.

"It is cold here, François."

The servant consulted the thermometer.

"It is five degrees warmer than you are accustomed to, my lord," he replied.

"Bring me the thermometer," commanded the old man. "You should not lie, François. It is a bad fault in servants. Leave it to your masters; it is a polite vice. The privilege of the world's potentates, diplomats and great people. Never fall into the rut of lying, François, or you will soon outlive your usefulness as a valet."

"You can see that I speak the truth, my lord," was the response, as calm as ever, for nothing disturbed or ruffled this ideal servant.

He held out the thermometer for the marquis' inspection and the latter examined it carefully. The cigar fell from his fingers to the floor.

The attentive valet picked it up and threw it into the grate.

"I believe, François," stammered the marquis, "that the fault lies with me. It is I--I, who am growing cold like death."

"Yes, my lord," answered the calm and imperturbable servant.

"'Yes?' you blockhead!" shrieked the master. "Do you know what you are saying?"

"Well, no, then, my lord," responded the unmoved valet.

"Yes and no!" shouted the marquis in a voice that was wildly discordant. "What do you mean?"

"Whatever my lord pleases," was the quiet response.

"Mon Dieu! I'll discharge you."

The servant only smiled.

"Why did you smile?"

"Oh, my lord--"

"Was it not that you thought it a good joke for a dying man to

discharge his servant?"

"My lord is quick to catch the humorous side of anything," returned François.

"Begone, idiot! You are waiting for my death to discharge you. I can see it in your eyes. Yet stay, François, for, if you leave me, I shall be alone. You will not leave me?"

"As my lord desires," was François' response.

"I imagine I should feel better if I had my footbath."

The servant removed the shoes and silken stockings from his master's feet and propped him up in a chair, throwing a blanket over his shoulders and heaping more wood upon the fire in the grate.

"More fire, you idiot!" cried the marquis, peevishly. "Do you not see that I am freezing?"

"It is ten degrees above the temperature my lord always ordered," retorted François, coolly.

"Ten degrees! Oh, you wish to remind me that the end is approaching? You do not dare deny it!" The valet shrugged his shoulders.

"But I am not gone yet." He wagged his head cunningly and began to laugh to himself. His mind apparently rambled, for he started to chant a French love song in a voice that had long since lost its capacity for a sustained tone. The words were distinct, although the melody was broken, and the spectacle was gruesome enough. As he concluded he looked at the valet as if for approbation and began to mumble about his early love affairs.

"Bah, François," he said shrilly, "I'll be up to-morrow as gay as ever. Vive l'amour! vive la joie! It was a merry life we led, eh, François?"

"Merry indeed, my lord."

"It kept you busy, François. There was the little peasant girl on the Rhine. What flaxen hair she had and eyes like the sky! Yet a word of praise--a little flattery--"

"My lord was irresistible," said the valet with mild sarcasm.

"Let me see, François, what became of her?"

"She drowned herself in the river."

"That is true. I had forgotten. Well, life is measured by pleasures, not by years, and I was the prince of coxcombs. Up at ten o'clock;

no sooner on account of the complexion; then visits from the tradespeople and a drive in the park to look at the ladies. It was there I used to meet the English actress. 'Twas there, with her, I vowed the park was a garden of Eden! What a scene, when my barrister tried to settle the case! Fortunately a marriage in England was not a marriage in France. I saw her last night, François"--with an insane look--"in the flesh and blood; as life-like as the night before we took the stage for Brighton!" Suddenly he shrieked and a look of terror replaced the vain, simpering expression.

"There, François!" Glancing with awe behind him. And truly there stood a dark shadow; a gruesome presence. His face became distorted and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

The valet gazed at him with indifference. Then he went to an inner room and brought a valise which he began packing carefully and methodically. After he had completed this operation he approached the dressing table and took up a magnificent jeweled watch, which he examined for a moment before thrusting it into his pocket. A snuff box, set with diamonds, and several rings followed. François with the same deliberation opened a drawer and took out a small box which he tried to open, and, failing, forced the lid with the poker. At this, my lord opened his eyes, and, in a weak voice, for his strength had nearly deserted him, demanded:

"What are you doing, François?"

"Robbing you, my lord," was the slow and dignified response.

The marquis' eyes gleamed with rage. He endeavored to call out, but his voice failed him and he fell back, trembling and overcome.

"Thief! Ingrate!" he hissed, hoarsely.

"I beg you not to excite yourself, my lord," said the stately valet. "You are already very weak and it will hasten the end."

"Is this the way you repay me?"

"My lord will not need these things soon."

"Have you no gratitude?" stammered the marquis, whose physical and mental condition was truly pitiable.

"Gratitude for having been called 'idiot,' 'dog,' and 'blockhead' nearly all my life! I am somewhat lacking in that quality, I fear."

"Is there no shame in you?"

"Shame?" repeated François, as he proceeded to ransack another drawer. "There might have been before I went into your service, my lord. Yes; once I felt shame for you. It was years ago, in London, when you

deserted your beautiful wife. When I saw how she worshiped you and what a noble woman she was, I confess I felt ashamed that I served one of the greatest blackguards in Europe--"

"Oh, you scoundrel--" exclaimed the marquis, his face becoming a ghastly hue.

"Be calm, my lord. You really are in need of all your energy. For years I have submitted to your shameful service. I have been at the beck and call of one of the greatest roués and villains in France. Years of such association would somewhat soil any nature. Another thing, my lord, I must tell you, since you and I are settling our last accounts. For years I have endured your miserable King Louis Philippe. A king? Bah! He fled from the back door! A coward, who shaved his whiskers for a disguise."

"No more, rascal!"

"Rascal yourself, you worn-out, driveling breath of corruption! It is so pleasant to exercise a gentleman's privilege of invective! Ah, here is the purse. Au revoir, my lord. A pleasant dissolution!"

But by this time the marquis was speechless, and François, taking the valise in hand, deferentially left the room. He locked the door behind him and thrust the key into his pocket.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE OLD CEMETERY

The engagement at the new St. Charles was both memorable and profitable, The Picayune, before the fifties, an audacious sheet, being especially kind to the players. "This paper," said a writer of the day, "was as full of witticisms as one of Thackeray's dreams after a light supper, and, as for Editors Straws and Phazma, they are poets who eat, talk and think rhyme." The Picayune contained a poem addressed to Miss Carew, written by Straws in a cozy nook in the veranda at the Lake End, with his absinthe before him and the remains of an elaborate repast about him. It was then quite the fashion to write stanzas to actresses; the world was not so prosaic as it is now, and even the president of the United States, John Quincy Adams, penned graceful verses to a fair ward of Thalia.

One noon, a few days after the opening performance, several members of the company were late for rehearsal and Barnes strode impatiently to and fro, glancing at his watch and frowning darkly. To avenge himself for the remissness of the players, he roared at the stage carpenters who were constructing a balcony and to the supers who were shifting flats to the scenery room. The light from an open door at the back of the stage dimly illumined the scene; overhead, in the flies, was intense darkness; while in front, the auditorium yawned like a chasm,

in no wise suggestive of the brilliant transformation at night.

"Ugh!" said Susan, standing in one of the entrances. "It is like playing to ghosts! Fancy performing to an audience of specters! Perhaps the phantoms of the past really do assemble in their old places on occasions like this. Only you can't hear them applaud or laugh."

"Are you looking for admirers among ghosts?" remarked Hawkes, ironically.

"Don't," she returned, with a little shiver.

"So, ladies and gentlemen, you are all here at last?" exclaimed Barnes, interrupting this cheerful conversation. "Some of you are late again to-day. It must not happen again. Go to Victor's, Moreau's, or Miguel's, as much as you please. If you have a headache or a heartache in consequence, that is your own affair, but I am not to be kept waiting the next day."

"Victor's, indeed!" retorted the elastic old lady. "As if--"

"No one supposed, Madam, that at your age"--began the manager.

"At my age! If you think--"

"Are you all ready?" interrupted Barnes, hastily, knowing he would be worsted in any argument with this veteran player. "Then clear the stage! Act first!" And the rehearsal began.

If the audience were specters, the performers moved, apparently without rhyme or reason, mere shadows on the dimly lighted stage; enacting some semblance to scenes of mortal life; their jests and gibes, unnatural in that comparatively empty place; their voices, out of the semi-darkness, like those of spirits rehearsing acts of long ago. In the evening it would all become an amusing, bright-colored reality, but now the barrenness of the scenes was forcibly apparent.

"That will do for to-day," said the manager at the conclusion of the last act. "To-morrow, ladies and gentlemen, at the same time. And any one who is late--will be fined!"

"Changing the piece every few nights is all work and no play," complained Susan.

"It will keep you out of mischief, my dear," replied Barnes, gathering up his manuscripts.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" returned Miss Susan, with a defiant toss of the head, as she moved toward the dressing-room where they had left their wraps. It was a small apartment, fairly bright and cheery, with here and there a portrait against the wall. Above the

dressing-table hung a mirror, diamond-scratched with hieroglyphic scrawls, among which could be discerned a transfixed heart, spitted like a lark on an arrow, and an etching of Lady Gay Spanker, with cork-screw curls. Taglioni, in pencil caricature, her limbs "divinely slender," gyrated on her toes in reckless abandon above this mute record of names now forgotten.

"What lovely roses, Constance!" exclaimed Susan, as she entered, bending over a large bouquet on one of the chairs. "From the count, I presume?"

"Yes," indifferently answered the young girl, who was adjusting her hat before the mirror.

"How attentive he is!" cooed Susan, her tones floating in a higher register. "Poor man! Enjoy yourself while you may, my dear," she went on. "When youth is gone, what is left? Women should sow their wild oats as well as men. I don't call them wild oats, though, but paradisaical oats. The Elysian fields are strewn with them."

As she spoke, her glance swept her companion searchingly, and, in that brief scrutiny, Susan observed with inward complacency how pale the other was, and how listless her manner! Their common secret, however, made Susan's outward demeanor sweetly solicitous and gently sympathetic. Her mind, passing in rapid review over recent events, dwelt not without certain satisfaction upon results. True, every night

she was still forced to witness Constance's success, which of itself was wormwood and gall to Susan, to stand in the wings and listen to the hateful applause; but the conviction that the sweets of popular favor brought not what they were expected to bring, was, in a way, an antidote to Susan's dissatisfaction.

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing and can sometimes be made annoying; in Susan's case it was a weapon sharpened with honeyed phrase and consolatory bearing, for she was not slow to discover nor to avail herself of the irritating power this knowledge gave her. Constance's pride and reticence, however, made it difficult for Susan to discern when her shafts went true. Moreover, although harboring no suspicion of Susan's dissimulation, she instinctively held aloof from her and remained coldly unresponsive. Perhaps in the depths of Susan's past lurked something indefinable which threw its shadow between them, an inscrutable impediment; and her inability to penetrate the young actress' reserve, however she might wound her, awakened Susan's resentment. But she was too world-wise to display her irritation. She even smiled sweetly now, as confidante to confidante, and, turning to her impulsively, said:

"Let me help you on with your cloak, dear?"

Out of the quiet, deserted theater, isolated from external din, to the busy streets, where drays went thundering by, and industry manifested itself in resounding clatter, was a sudden, but not altogether

unwelcome, change to Constance. Without waiting for the manager, who paused at the rear entrance to impress his final instructions upon a stolid-looking property-man, she turned quickly into the noisy thoroughfares.

On and on her restlessness led her, conscious of the clangor of vehicles and voices and yet remote from them; past those picturesque suggestions of the one-time Spanish rulers in which the antiquarian could detect evidence of remote Oriental infusion; past the silken seductions of shops, where ladies swarmed and hummed like bees around the luscious hive; past the idlers' resorts, from whence came the rat-a-tat of clinking billiard balls and the louder rumble of falling ten-pins.

In a window of one of these places, a club with a reputation for exclusiveness, a young man was seated, newspaper in hand, a cup of black coffee on a small table before him, and the end of a cigar smoking on the tray where he had placed it. With a yawn, he had just thrown aside the paper and was reaching for the thick, dark beverage--his hand thin and nervous--when, glancing without, he caught sight of the actress in the crowd. Obeying a sudden impulse, he arose, picking up his hat which lay on a chair beside him.

"Yo' order am ready in a moment, Mr. Mauville," said a colored servant, hurrying toward the land baron as the latter was leaving.

"I've changed my mind and don't want it," replied the other curtly.

And sauntering down the steps of the club with ill-concealed impatience, he turned in the direction the young girl had taken, keeping her retreating figure in view; now, so near her in the crowded street, he could almost touch her; then, as they left the devious ways, more distant, but ever with his eyes bent upon her. He had almost spoken, when in the throng he approached within arm's length, but something--he knew not what--restrained him, and a press of people separated them. Only for a moment, and then he continued the questionable pleasure of following her.

Had she turned, she would probably have seen her pursuer, but absorbed in thought, she continued on her way, unconscious of his presence. On and on she hurried, until she reached the tranquil outskirts and lingered before the gate of one of the cemeteries. At the same time the land baron slackened his footsteps, hesitating whether to advance or turn back. After a moment's indecision, she entered the cemetery; her figure, receding in the distance, was becoming more and more indistinct, when he started forward quickly and also passed through the gate.

The annual festival of the dead, following All Saint's day, was being observed in the burial ground. This commemoration of those who have departed in the communion--described by Tertullian in the second century as an "apostolic tradition," so old was the sacrifice!--was

celebrated with much pomp and variety in the Crescent City. In the vicinity of the cemetery gathered many colored marchandes, their heads and shoulders draped in shawls and fichus of bright, diversified hues; before them, perambulating booths with baskets of molasses candy or pain-patate. Women, dressed in mourning, bore to the tomb flowers and plants, trays of images, wreaths, crosses, anchors of dried immortelles and artificial roses. Some were accompanied by priests and acolytes with censers, the former intoning the service:

Fidelium Deus omnium conditor--

A solemn peace fell upon the young girl as she entered and she seemed to leave behind her all disturbing emotions, finding refuge in the supreme tranquillity of this ancient city of the dead. She was surrounded by a resigned grief, a sorrow so dignified that it did not clash with the sweeter influences of nature. The monotonous sound of the words of the priests harmonized with the scene. The tongue of a nation that had been resolved into the elements was fitting in this place, where time and desolation had left their imprint in discolored marble, inscriptions almost effaced, and clambering vines.

--Animabus famulorum--

To many the words so mournfully intoned brought solace and surcease from sorrow. The sisters of charity moved among the throng with grave, pale faces, mere shadows of their earthly selves, as though they had

undergone the first stage of the great metamorphosis which is promised. To them, who had already buried health, vitality and passion, was not this chant to the dead, this strange intoning of words, sweeter than the lullaby crooned by a nurse to a child, more stirring than the patriotic hymn to a soldier, and fraught with more fervor than the romantic dream of a lover?

Ut indulgentiam, quam semper optaverunt--

The little orphan children heard and heeded no more than the butterfly which lighted upon the engraven words, "Dust to dust," and poised gracefully, as it bathed in the sunshine, stretching its wings in wantonness of beauty.

Piis supplicationibus consequantur--

Now Constance smiled to see the little ones playing on the steps of a monument. It was the tomb of a great jurist, a man of dignity during his mundane existence, his head crammed with those precepts which are devised for the temporal well-being of that fabric, sometimes termed society, and again, civilization. The poor waifs, with suppressed laughter--they dared not give full vent to their merriment with the black-robed sisters not far away--ran around the steps, unmindful of the inscription which might have been written by a Johnson, and as unconscious of unseemly conduct as the insects that hummed in the grass.

"Hush!" whispered one of the sisters, as a funeral cortège approached.

The children, wide-eyed in awe and wonder, desisted in their play.

"It is an old man who died last night," said a nun in a low voice to Constance, noticing her look of inquiry.

The silver crucifix shone fitfully ahead, while the chanting of the priests, winding in and out after the holy symbol, fell upon the ear. And the young girl gazed with pity as the remains of the Marquis de Ligne, her father, were borne by.

Qui vivis et regnas. Glorificamus te.

CHAPTER XIII

AN INCONGRUOUS RÔLE

Longer and longer trailed the shadow of a tall tombstone until, as the sun went down, it merged into the general twilight like a life lengthening out and out and finally blending in restful darkness. With that transition came a sudden sense of isolation and loneliness; the little burial ground seemed the world; the sky, its walls and ceiling.

From the neighborhood of the gates had vanished the dusky venders, trundling their booths and stalls citywards. As abruptly had disappeared the bearers of flowers and artificial roses with baskets poised upon their heads, imparting to their figures dignity and erectness. The sad-eyed nuns had wended their way out of the little kingdom of the departed, surrounded by the laughing children and preceded by the priests and acolytes. All the sounds and activities of the day--the merriment of the little ones, the oblations of the priests, the greetings of friends--were followed by inertness and languor. Motionless against the sky spread the branches of the trees, like lines etched there; still were the clambering vines that clasped monolith and column.

But suddenly that death-like lull in nature's animation and unrest was

abruptly broken, and an uproarious vociferation dispelled the voiceless peace.

"For Jack ashore's a Croesus, lads,
With a Jill for every Jack--"

sang a hoarse voice as its owner came staggering along one of the walks of the cemetery; for all his song, no blue-water sailor-man, but a boisterous denizen of the great river, a raftsman or a keel-boatman, who had somehow found himself in the burial ground and now was beating aimlessly about. How this rollicking waif of the grog shop came to wander so far from the convivial haunts of his kind and to choose this spot for a ramble, can only be explained by the vagaries of inebriety.

"With a Jill in your wake,
A fair port you'll make--"

he continued, when his eye fell upon the figure of a woman, some distance ahead, and fairly discernible in the gathering twilight. Immediately the song ceased and he steadied himself, gazing incredulously after the form that had attracted his attention.

"Hello!" he said. "Avast, my dear!" he called out.

Echoing in that still place, his harsh tones produced a startling

effect, and the figure before him moved faster and faster, casting a glance behind her at the man from the river, who with snatches of song, started in uncertain but determined pursuit. As the heavy footsteps sounded nearer, she increased her pace, with eyes bent upon the distant gate; darker seemed to grow the way; more menacing the shadows outstretched across the path. Louder crunched the boots on the shell walk; more audible became the words of the song that flowed from his lips, when the sound of a sudden and violent altercation replaced the hoarse-toned cadence, an altercation that was of brief duration, characterized by longshoreman oaths, and followed by silence; and then a figure, not that of the tuneful waterman, sprang to the side of the startled girl.

"Miss Carew!" exclaimed a well-remembered voice.

Bewildered, breathing quickly, she gazed from Edward Mauville, who thus unexpectedly accosted her, to the prostrate form, lying motionless on the road. The rude awakening from her day-dream in the hush of that peaceful place, and the surprising sequence had dazed her senses, and, for the moment, it seemed something tragic must have happened.

"Is he dead?" she asked quickly, unable to withdraw her glance from the immovable figure, stretched out in the dim light on the path.

"No fear!" said Mauville, quietly, almost thoughtfully, although his

eyes were yet bright from the encounter. "You can't kill his kind," he added, contemptuously. "Brutes from coal barges, or raftsmen from the head waters! He struck against a stone when he fell, and what with that, and the liquor in him, will rest there awhile. He'll come to without remembering what has happened."

Turning moodily, the land baron walked slowly down the road, away from the gate; she thought he was about to leave her, when he paused, as though looking for something, stooped to the ground, and returned, holding out a garment.

"You dropped your wrap, Miss Carew," he said, awkwardly. "The night is cold and you will need it." She offered no resistance when he placed it over her shoulders; indeed, seemed unconscious of the attention.

"Don't you think we had better go?" he went on. "It won't hurt him"--indicating the motionless body--"to stay here--the brute!"

But as he spoke, with some constraint, her eyes, full of doubts, met his, and he felt a flush mantle his face. The incongruity of his position appealed forcibly to him. Had he not been watching and following her himself? Seeing her helpless, alone, in the silent spot, where she had unconsciously lingered too long, had he not been almost on the point of addressing her? Moved by vague desires, had he not already started impetuously toward her, when the man from the river had come rollicking along and insinuated himself after his fashion in

the other's rôle?

And at the sight--the fleeing girl, the drunken, profane waterman!--how his heart had leaped and his body had become steel for the encounter; an excess of vigor for a paltry task! Jack, as he called himself, might have been a fighting-man earlier in the day, but now he had gone down like straw. When the excitement of this brief collision was over, however, the land baron found his position as unexpected as puzzling.

As these thoughts swiftly crossed his mind, he could not forbear a bitter laugh, and she, walking more quickly toward the gate, regarded him with inquiry, not perhaps unmingled with apprehension. A picture of events, gone by, arose before her like a menacing shadow over the present. He interpreted her glance for what it meant, and angry that she doubted him, angry with himself, said roughly:

"Oh, you haven't anything to fear!"

Her answering look was so gentle, so sad, an unwonted feeling of compunction seized him; he repented of his harshness, and added less brusquely:

"Why did you remain so late?"

"I did not realize how late it had become."

"Your thoughts must have been very absorbing!" he exclaimed quickly, his brow once more overcast.

Not difficult was it for him to surmise upon whom her mind had been bent, and involuntarily his jaw set disagreeably, while he looked at her resentfully. In that light he could but dimly discern her face. Her bonnet had fallen from her head; her eyes were bent before her, as though striving to penetrate the gathering darkness. With his sudden spell of jealousy came the temptation to clasp her in his arms in that silent, isolated place, but the figure of the sailor came between him and the desire, while pride, the heritage of the gentleman, fought down the longing. This self-conquest was not accomplished, however, without a sacrifice of temper, for after a pause, he observed:

"There is no accounting for a woman's taste!"

She did not controvert this statement, but the start she gave told him the shaft had sped home.

"An outlaw! An outcast!" exclaimed the patroon, stung beyond endurance by his thoughts.

Still no reply; only more hurried footsteps! Around them sounded a gentle rustling; a lizard scrambled out of their path through the crackling leaves; a bat, or some other winged creature, suddenly whirred before them and vanished. They had now approached the gate,

through which they passed and found themselves on the road leading directly to the city, whose lights had already begun to twinkle in the dusk.

The cheering rumble of a carriage and the aspect of the not far-distant town quickened her spirits and imparted elasticity to her footsteps. Upon the land baron they produced an opposite effect, for he was obviously reluctant to abandon the interview, however unsatisfactory it might be. There was nothing to say, and yet he was loath to leave her; there was nothing to accomplish, and yet he wished to remain with her. For this reason, as they drew near the city, his mood became darker, like the night around them. Instinctively, she felt the turbulent passions stirring in his bosom; his sudden silence, his dogged footsteps reawakened her misgivings. Furtively she regarded him, but his eyes were fixed straight before him on the soft luster above the city, the reflection of the lights, and she knew and mistrusted his thoughts. Although she found his silence more menacing than his words, she could think of nothing to say to break the spell, and so they continued to walk mutely side by side. An observer, seeing them beneath the cypress, a lovers' promenade, with its soft, enfolding shadows, would have taken them for a well-matched couple, who had no need for language.

But when they had emerged from that romantic lane and entered the city, the land baron breathed more freely. She was now surrounded by movement and din; the seclusion of the country gave way to the stir of

the city; she was no longer dependent on his good offices; his rôle of protector had ended when they left the cypress walk behind them.

His brow cleared; he glanced at her with ill-concealed admiration; he noticed with secret pride the attention she attracted from passers-by, the sidelong looks of approval that followed her through the busy streets. The land baron expanded into his old self; he strode at her side, gratified by the scrutiny she invited; assurance radiated from his eyes like some magnetic heat; he played at possession wilfully, perversely. "Why not," whispered Hope. "A woman's mind is shifting ever. Her fancy--a breath! The other is gone. Why--"

"It was not accident my being in the cemetery, Miss Carew," said Mauville, suddenly covering her with his glance. Meeting her look of surprise unflinchingly, he continued: "I followed you there; through the streets, into the country! My seeing you first was chance; my presence in the burial ground the result of that chance. The inevitable result!" he repeated softly. "As inevitable as life! Life; what is it? Influences which control us; forces which bind us! It is you, or all; you or nothing!"

She did not reply; his voice, vibrating with feeling, touched no answering chord. Nevertheless, a new, inexplicable wave of sorrow moved her. It might be he had cared for her as sincerely as it was possible for his wayward heart to care for any one. Perhaps time would yet soften his faults, and temper his rashness. With that shade of

sorrow for him there came compassion as well; compassion that overlooked the past and dwelt on the future.

She raised her steady eyes. "Why should it be 'I or nothing,' as you put it?" she finally answered slowly. "Influences may control us in a measure, but we may also strive for something. We can always strive."

"For what? For what we don't want? That's the philosophy of your moralists, Miss Carew," he exclaimed. "That's your modern ethics of duty. Playing tricks with happiness! The game isn't worth the candle. Or, if you believe in striving," he added, half resentfully, half imploringly, "strive to care for me but a little. But a little!" he said again. "I who once wanted all, and would have nothing but all, am content to ask, to plead, for but a little."

"I see no reason," she replied, wearily, yet not unkindly, "why we should not be friends."

"Friends!" he answered, bitterly. "I do not beg for a loaf, but a crumb. Yet you refuse me that! I will wait! Only a word of encouragement! Will you not give it?"

She turned and looked into his eyes, and, before she spoke, he knew what her answer would be.

"How can I?" she said, simply. "Why should I promise something I can

never fulfil?"

He held her glance as though loath to have it leave him.

"May I see you again?" he asked, abruptly.

She shook her head. His gaze fell, seeing no softening in her clear look.

"You are well named," he repeated, more to himself than to her. "Constance! You are constant in your dislikes as well as your likes."

"I have no dislike for you," she replied. "It seems to have been left behind me somewhere."

"Only indifference, then!" he said, dully.

"No; not indifference!"

"You do care what--may become of me?"

"You should do so much--be so much in the world," she answered, thoughtfully.

"Sans peur et sans reproche!" he cried, half-amused, half-cheerlessly. "What a pity I met you--too late!"

They were now at the broad entrance of the brilliantly-lighted hotel. Several loungers, smoking their after-dinner cigars, gazed at the couple curiously.

"Mauville's a lucky dog," said one.

"Yes; he was born with a silver spoon," replied the person addressed.

As he passed through the envious throng, the land baron had regained his self-command, although his face was marked with an unusual pallor. In his mind one thought was paramount--that the walk begun at the burial-ground was drawing to an end; their last walk; the finale of all between them! Yet he could call to mind nothing further to say. His story had been told; the conclusion reached. She, too, had spoken, and he knew she would never speak differently. Bewildered and unable to adjust his new and strange feelings, it dawned upon him he had never understood himself and her; that he had never really known what love was, and he stood abashed, confronted by his own ignorance. Passion, caprice, fancy, he had seen depth in their shallows, but now looked down and discerned the pebbly bottom. All this and much more surged through his brain as he made his way through the crowd, and, entering the corridor of the hotel, took formal leave of the young girl at the stairway.

"Good-night, Miss Carew," he said, gravely.

"Good-night," she replied. And then, on the steps, she turned and looked down at him, extending her hand: "Thank you!"

That half-timid, low "thank you!" he knew was all he would ever receive from her. He hardly felt the hand-clasp; he was hardly conscious when she turned away. A heavier hand fell upon his shoulder.

"You sly dog!" said a thick voice. "Well, a judge of a good horse is a judge of a handsome woman! We're making up a few bets on the horses to-morrow. Colonel Ogelby will ride Dolly D, and I'm to ride my Gladiator. It'll be a gentlemen's race."

"Aren't we gentlemen?" growled a professional turfsman.

"Gad! it's the first time I ever heard a jockey pretend to be one!" chuckled the first speaker. "What do you say, Mauville?"

"What do I say?" repeated the land baron, striving to collect his thoughts. "What--why, I'll make it an even thousand, if you ride your own horse, you'll--"

"Win?" interrupted the proud owner.

"No; fall off before he's at the second quarter!"

"Done!" said the man, immediately.

"Huzza!" shouted the crowd.

"That's the way they bet on a gentlemen's race!" jeered the gleeful jockey.

"Drinks on Gladiator!" exclaimed some one. And as no southern gentleman was ever known to refuse to drink to a horse or a woman, the party carried the discussion to the bar-room.